

PERFORMING WORKFARE  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE SO-CALLED ONE-EURO-JOBS

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Timothy Haupt  
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Timothy Haupt, Ph. D.

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Anthropological considerations of welfare reform, in their most compelling moments, mobilize ethnographic evidence to undermine the hegemony of a neoliberal project, which orients the logic of public services toward the market if it doesn't privatize these services outright. While my dissertation draws on and engages these studies, my fieldwork on a new workfare program in Germany required me to pursue a very different line of inquiry. Interviews with persons encompassing a range of perspectives (workfare participants, NGO administrators, social workers, Job Center case workers, and Job Center administrators) quickly proved that it wasn't the neoliberal rhetoric of the reformers that had become hegemonic but the politico-economic rhetoric of their critics. In order to come to terms with the significance of this, I (1) readdress the theoretical effect of ideology via a discussion of Weber, Freud, and Lacan, whereby I argue that "spirit" can, in psychoanalytic terms, be understood as socially produced desire; (2) show how the legal and institutional framework of Germany's workfare state supports a rational-strategic relation to work but not a spirited one; (3) show how the political rhetoric of reform demoralizes the middle class just as their critical reaction ultimately dispirits those participating in the workfare programs; and (4) discuss the relevance of German MCs for the cultural

framework surrounding welfare and its reform in that some refer to themselves as losers or deadbeats in lyrics that structurally resemble American gangsta rap.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Timothy Haupt graduated from Haverford College in 2002 with a double major in Philosophy and German. In 2004, he earned an M.A. from the University of Chicago in German. Between 2008 and 2010, he completed 18 months of field research in Berlin, Germany with funding from Fulbright and DAAD. He is currently a lecturer with the Writing Program at Princeton University.

For B.H. –Here we are.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABM – *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme* – A previous state-subsidized employment program, which aimed to ease unemployment.

CDU – Christian Democratic Party

Hartz IV – The Fourth Law for the Reform of the Labor Market, which came into effect on 1 January 2005; it serves as the legal basis of Germany's workfare state.

MAE – *Abeitsgelegenheit mit Mehraufwandschädigung* – The so-called One-Euro-Job, which aims to integrate long-term unemployed persons into regular employment.

SPD – Social Democratic Party

Wer nicht arbeitet, soll auch nicht essen.  
(Whoever doesn't work, should also not eat.)

-Franz Müntefering (SPD), 9 May 2006<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As Carol Greenhouse has argued, “neoliberal reform...has restructured the most prominent public relationships that constitute *belonging*: politics, markets, work, and self-identity” (Greenhouse 2010, 2). In Germany, a set of four Laws for the Reform of the German Labor Market (*Gesetze zur Reform des Arbeitsmarkts*), commonly referred to as the Hartz laws, did just that between 1 January 2003 and 1 January 2005. The fourth, Hartz IV as it is called, ushered in a radically new “welfare” state, whose operating principle consists in challenging (*fordern*) its “customers.”<sup>2</sup> In short, this law requires each earning-capable, assistance-requiring person (*erwerbsfähige Hilfebedürftige*) to make every attempt to reduce or terminate his or her dependence on the state. The introduction of contingent benefits sought to guarantee that the customer accepts the challenge: if a person is unwilling to “make every attempt,” his or her benefits can be suspended, in some cases in their entirety. The German welfare state has then, as regards its legally circumscribed goals, become an employment agency, which is to say a workfare state. A person does not receive benefits merely to guarantee his or her existence, let alone to allow him or her to participate in the German democratic process. Rather, a person

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Müntefering was Vice-Chancellor and Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs between November 2005 and November 2007. He later became the head of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Quoted in “Arbeiten fürs Essen,” Katharina Schuler, *Zeit Online*, 10 May 2006, <http://www.zeit.de/online/2006/20/Schreiner>. It perhaps need not be pointed out that Müntefering is quoting 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (as the King James Version puts it: For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat). Perhaps less well known, though, is the fact that August Bebel, a key figure in the early history of the SPD, also famously quoted this verse (1891).

<sup>2</sup> I realize the term “customer” may strike some as odd, the better choice being “client.” In Job Center lingo, persons receiving welfare benefits are called *Kunden*, which is the common German word for customers. One could also use the German word “Klient,” which is the term that lawyers, therapists, and others use for the persons who receive their services. But Job Center employees don’t say “Klient,” they say “Kunde” and that very clearly means *customer*. The term also appears in the federal laws regulating welfare (for example, see *SGBII*, 51a).

receives benefits so that the person may become independent of the benefits. In other words, “the giving hand” currently has less to do with redistribution than with rendering the “unproductive” more productive.<sup>3</sup>

Welfare reform has largely been justified in the United States as well as Europe with reference to economic necessity.<sup>4</sup> Sociologists have questioned the necessity of this shift in policy (Schram 1995, 2006; Wacquant 2009). Loïc Wacquant pushed the point perhaps furthest by arguing that the transition from welfare to workfare “is *not* a mechanical response to economic changes so much as an *exercise in state crafting* aimed at producing—and then adapting to—these very changes” (2009, 103). According to Wacquant, this state crafting entails the reorganization of bureaucracies in charge of managing dependent populations, on the one hand, and producing and disseminating official schema of perception capable of depicting and justifying the governmental practices of state functionaries (103). David Harvey’s characterization of neoliberalism makes the same basic point: “Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (2005, 3). In summary, these theorists grant policy an exceptional amount of efficaciousness such that it becomes, first, the driving force of social change and,

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<sup>3</sup> The terms here are drawn from a feuilleton debate unleashed when Peter Sloterdijk published an essay in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* titled “The Revolution of the Giving Hand” on 13 June 2009. Sloterdijk adopted numerous arguments of “authors of a liberal tendency” and made a case for how welfare constitutes the reverse exploitation of the productive. See Peter Sloterdijk, “Die Revolution der gebenden Hand,” *FAZ*, 13 June 2009; Axel Honneth, “Fataler Tiefsinn aus Karlsruhe,” *Die Zeit*, 24 Sept. 2009; Peter Sloterdijk, “Das elfte Gebot: die progressive Einkommenssteuer,” *FAZ*, 27 Sept. 2009; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Der Spieler und der Baumeister,” *Die Zeit*, 1 Oct. 2009; Christoph Menke, “Wahrheit. Nicht Stil,” *Die Zeit*, 15 Oct. 2009; Karl-Heinz Bohrer, “Lobhudeleien der Gleichheit,” *FAZ*, 21 Oct. 2009; Peter Sloterdijk, “Aufbruch der Leistungsträger,” *Cicero*, 22 Oct. 2009; “Eingeweide des Zeitgeistes,” *Spiegel* 44, 26 Oct. 2009; Richard David Precht, “Zwei Männer und der Mond,” *Der Spiegel* 45, 2 Nov. 2009. Two books have emerged from these debates (Wagner and Rehmann 2010; Sloterdijk 2010).

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this rhetoric in Germany.

second, the determinative cultural framework for grasping that change. Neoliberal policy in this view constitutes, then, its own cause, justification, and grounds for reproduction.

If we assume the same for the German case of welfare reform, that the economizing discourse surrounding and justifying the apparent reductions in social spending became determinative for how social reality is perceived, then we would also have to say that the economizing rhetoric worked *too well*. For one doesn't speak of the Laws for the Reform of the Labor Market (the official name of welfare reform) but rather Hartz IV and its One-Euro-Jobs. Again, the official name for the One-Euro-Jobs is Working Opportunities with Additional Cost Compensation (*Arbeitsgelegenheiten mit Mehraufwandsentschädigung*, *AGH MAEs*, or just *MAEs*).<sup>5</sup> The MAEs are a common mechanism used to “challenge” long-term unemployed persons who are not expected to receive employment offers in the near future. Typically lasting six months, an MAE is a 30 hour per week “working opportunity,” which does not constitute a legal employment relation and hence is not subject to any other employment regulations. Participants are paid anywhere from 1.50 to 2.00 Euros per hour (depending on region) in addition to their basic unemployment benefits. The workfare positions were immediately dubbed One-Euro-Jobs and have been the focal point of widespread criticism and ridicule. Accordingly, the German case of welfare reform is marked by a discursive complexity that doesn't conform to what one might have expected based on what we know about the American reforms, which occurred almost a decade earlier.

Media coverage of early disasters that could be associated with the Hartz reforms often took gruesome details as indications of the social ills that had been set into motion by welfare state devolution. In these cases, national coverage went beyond reporting the facts one could read from local coverage. Consider the following tragedy as an example. At 7:40pm on 9 November

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<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I will generally refer to these positions by their abbreviation—MAEs.

2004, a 51 year-old man drove his Citroën Saxo directly into the entrance of the Federal Employment Agency's office in Bietigheim-Bissingen (one of the richest cities in Germany per capita). Riding shotgun was a 12 liter bottle of propane, which had been opened. The man was burnt beyond recognition; the local office of the Federal Employment Agency suffered around 2,000 Euros of damage. (*Bocholter-Borkener Volksblatt*, 10 Nov. 2004) An article describing this event in *Der Spiegel* mentioned all of these details but went further: Steffan Winter indicated that the violent act and a string of others were directly linked to the introduction of Hart IV in his article "Disturbed Peace":

The security status in the Employment Agencies and Social Service Offices across the country is already anything but relaxed. In recent weeks, there have been bomb threats against Employment Agencies in Wittenberg (Sachsen-Anhalt), Deggendorf (Bayern), Waiblingen (Baden-Württemberg), Leipzig (Sachsen), Stendal (Sachsen-Anhalt), and in Bergen auf Rügen. In Bergen, there was also a murder threat; there were arson attacks in the Brandenburg towns of Rathenow and Königs Wusterhausen. Toward the end of August in Berlin-Lichtenberg a 52 year-old secretary of the Federal Employment Agency was attacked by a customer with a kitchen knife. She survived because the blade broke off. (*Der Spiegel*, 29 Nov. 2004)

Far less spectacular suicides also received detailed media coverage because of what they said about the Hartz reforms. Monday afternoon, 31 January 2005, people out for a walk in a wooded area near Zerpenschleuse (about 35 minutes north of Berlin) found a married couple together with their dog dead in their Opel Astra. The exhaust pipe had been partially blocked; the engine was still running. Carbon monoxide had poisoned Michael and Monika Stahl along with their pit bull. An article in *Die Zeit* quoted from the suicide note: "In the letter, the Stahls write: 'we definitely would have also lost the car.' The apartment. Their dental work. The future a threat. 'The new reforms are hitting us hard.' Hartz IV was the last link in a chain of disappointments." (*Berliner Kurier*, 2 February 2005; *Die Zeit*, 19 May 2005).

From a very early point, then, the narratives generated in media coverage of the Hartz reforms departed significantly from narrative strategies associated with neoliberalism. In this way, the Hartz reforms can be associated with a decisive split between the nation and the state, which continues to be a source of contention and struggle. For the legal framework of welfare reform in Germany was not accompanied by a single dominant cultural framework that supplied perceptual schema capable of organizing experiences in a way that would appear to magically justify and legitimate the legal reform. If any single cultural framework gained particular ascendancy, it was in fact the critical discourse generated in opposition to the legal reform. But this critical discourse only emphasizes the fractured nation-state and the struggles over how the two will be united.

The legacy of the Hartz reforms, then, is a shifting terrain of political alliances, which includes the emergence of new political parties and the weakening of an older one, i.e. the Social Democratic Party. Among the most notable changes to have occurred is the blurring of boundaries between the rhetoric of the radical right and the radical left and the emergence of a new xenophobia. In chapter 1, I will sketch the history of this new form of nationalism that isn't entirely premised on ethnic heritage though it still entails overt aggression toward immigrants and the unemployed. In chapter 2, I reconstruct the narrative strategies of the reform's critics and show how they reverse the cost-cutting strategies of welfare reform into a critique of those reform measures on the basis of a discursive analysis of hundreds of newspaper articles on the new workfare programs. In chapter 3, I explore the pressures created during the institutional restructuring that was required to expand the services of the Federal Employment Agency to persons who would otherwise have been served by the Social Services Agency. It wasn't just the long-term unemployed who were placed under greater scrutiny and forced to comply with new

expectations; the employees of the newly created Job Centers, a mix of staff from both federal and local offices, were held to stricter quantitative standards of performance, which in turn encouraged less personal and more abstract relationships to their “customers.”

I likewise spoke with numerous NGO administrators who became responsible for hiring and supervising the workfare participants. Interestingly, many of these organizations in Berlin rejected outright the general premises of the new workfare state and, instead, voiced many of the concerns expressed in the critical rhetoric of welfare reception. To whatever extent possible, then, many of these NGOs imposed forms of work discipline consistent with the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello) whereby self-direction and personal motivation is paramount. In chapter 4, I draw on interviews with both NGO administrators and workfare participants to investigate the complexities at work in the implementation of Germany’s new workfare programs. My interviews with the workfare participants themselves were marked by the numerous paradoxes that course through this cultural framework. Most, for example, indicated that they were happy to have had workfare positions and repeatedly sought them out though they just as quickly explained that the workfare positions were a waste of tax money, that they were simply a trick to doctor unemployment statistics, and hence that the positions would not improve their professional standing regardless of how much they wanted regular employment.

Given the way in which the new xenophobia slips between images of the enemy-other as Muslim or as unemployed, it has become imperative to expand an otherwise one-sided critical focus on the exclusion of ethnic minorities in Germany’s public sphere. In the final chapter, I turn to German hip hop as a site where the legitimacy and appropriateness of a *Versager*-identity (deadbeat or loser) has a fairly extensive history. Unfortunately, this history has been dismissed

as commercial and frivolous. For hip hop reception in Germany has been dominated by journalists and academics who have very narrowly advocated for anti-racist lyrics. I begin by deconstructing the antinomy central to critical hip hop reception that gives rise to a hierarchy between spheres of high and low culture. I then show how various artists in Germany have mobilized linguistic strategies similar to those of gangsta rap as they position themselves in relation to the subjectivizing power of this legitimate discourse even as they sell records on that very basis.

Jeder, der bei uns etwas kann und anstrebt ist  
willkommen; der Rest sollte woanders hingehen.

(Everyone who can do something here and is  
striving is welcome; the rest should go somewhere  
else.)

-Thilo Sarrazin

1.

## From Guest Workers to One-Euro Jobbers

### Introduction

In his recent book *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Giorgio Agamben pursues a genealogy of the dual structure of government in the West, constituted by a sovereign ruling body, on the one hand, and an administrative apparatus, on the other. Although this division appears to correspond with a common-sense divide between political and economic relations, the strength of Agamben's analysis lies in the way he reveals these two spheres to be immanently connected. In other words, according to Agamben, it's necessary to think both elements in their dynamic relation in order to comprehend adequately the seemingly automatic movement of the two halves of the governmental machine—and thereby also open the possibility of rendering its movement inoperative.

A number of recent ethnographies that critically engage the limits of belonging in Germany happen to correspond to these two elementary structural relations. On the one hand, Ruth Mandel, for example, has argued that the primary hindrance to the cultural and political enfranchisement of minority groups in Germany has been “a continued attachment to the ideal of...a common people bound by language, history, and tradition” (2008, 206). Along similar lines, Rita Chin has argued that guest workers in Germany pose “the most important and

enduring question of the postwar period: How would West German national identity be reconstituted after the Third Reich?” (2007,7). In short, scholarship focusing on minority ethnic identities in Germany often highlight the challenge that these identities pose to the seemingly organic unity of the nation-state. As Ernest Gellner pointed out in his classic meditation on nationalism, the core of the problem lies in what appears to be a natural relation between state and nation, polity and culture, but is in fact an arbitrary connection (2008, 6). On the other hand, Daphne Berdahl has argued that belonging and participation in a unified Germany are a matter of “what, how, and where you consume” (2010, 99). Although Berdahl was also investigating the relation between the state and its people, the key relation here is not a matter of sovereignty but of economy: the legitimacy of the state rests on whether or not it can regulate production so as to optimize consumption. If Agamben has accurately sketched the structure of modern government as a duality, then we should be able to think about belonging in Germany in terms that are at once ethnic-political and productive-economic.

Aside from the fact that Agamben’s abstractly formulated theory encourages us to discuss problems of governance in terms that are not one-sided, recent shifts in xenophobic rhetoric in Germany intertwine ethnicities and assumptions about productivity in curious ways. Consider this quote from an interview with Thilo Sarrazin (SPD) who continues to be one of the most controversial politicians in Germany: “When 1.3 billion Chinese are just as intelligent as the Germans but are more diligent and in the foreseeable future better educated while we Germans continue to adopt a Turkish mentality, then we have a larger problem” (2009, 200). Sarrazin often gives us much to talk about but here I would simply like to point out the inseparability of notions of ethnicity from questions of productivity: ethnic identity is not a matter of *who one has historically been* but of *how productive one currently is*. This new xenophobia—if we can in fact

call it that—is curious in that its stability is not premised on a clear rhetorical divide between an *ethnically* defined friend and foe. Rather, its stability appears to rest on the distinction between the more and less productive, which of course coincides with a slightly more fluid concept of ethnicity—“we” can become the other simply by adopting its mentality, which here refers to the way a group is assumed to relate to the production process.

In this chapter, I will first review some of the anthropological work in Germany that has dealt with the question of identity in the postwar era and situate it in a social history of the intersection of politics and economic regulation. Two major labor market policies will be of particular interest here: the guest worker program that helped fuel Germany’s economic miracle and the more recent Hartz reforms of the welfare state. As I will show in the second section of this chapter, welfare reform intensified anti-foreigner rhetoric just as it intensified a particular anti-German rhetoric, which finds its clearest formulation in Sarrazin’s recent book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does itself in).

## **I. An overview of guest workers and workfare participants**

West Germany’s internalization of guilt for the atrocities of World War II resulted in a taboo on race categories and the notion of *Lebensraum* (living space), which was central to the National Socialists’ policy linking blood relatives to territory (Borneman 1992, 50; Miller-Idriss 2009, 53). Nevertheless, West Germany retained the National Socialist laws regarding citizenship after World War II so as to maintain a claim on the East Germans as well as the millions who emigrated to Eastern Europe and Russia after the war. The central category of official belonging was changed from *Blutsverwandten* (blood relatives) to *deutschstämmig* (of German descent) though blood ties remained the only way to prove one’s descent as a German (Borneman 1992, 51). Borneman’s ethnography of post-unification identity indicates that West

German men and women both focused on their experiences of currency reform, a personal automobile, prosperity through work, and vacations as a way of acknowledging national belonging without transgressing the taboo on national pride (1992, 52-54). Borneman's study reveals a slightly broader historical base than Berdahl's suggestion of consumption as the primary practice for affirming national identity in Germany: it's not just on the basis of purchasing goods but also participating in the productivity and general prosperity of the economic miracle that allows one to belong to a national community. East Germany, on the other hand, externalized responsibility for World War II insofar as the communist leaders had been at odds with the National Socialists. Accordingly, the taboos on national pride in West Germany did not take hold in East Germany; instead, stories of heroism and resistance proliferated (Miller-Idriss 2009, 56).

Between 1955 and 1973, West Germany brought over two million persons from surrounding regions to fill demand for labor in their booming economy. Italians made up the majority of guest workers until around 1970 when large numbers of workers came from Greece, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Yugoslavia; by 1971, Turks made up the largest single minority with 652,800—about 100,000 more workers than any other national group (Chin 2007, 62). Guest worker numbers peaked in 1973 at 2.595 million when the federal government announced an end to the foreign recruitment of labor (*Anwerbstopp*) on 23 November in response to the recession that began that year (Chin 2007, 64).

Viewing immigration from the point of view of economic utility has been a foundational element in postwar discourse on immigration (Bauder 2008, 58). The official position on the guest worker question implied a consensus that the socioeconomic conditions demanded additional workers to sustain the economic miracle of postwar German production (Chin 2007,

46). Given the assumed temporary character of their stay, the guest workers did not initially pose any problems of integration. But rotation proved to be a financial burden such that extensions of stay were almost always granted (Chin 2007, 49). Given the significance in West Germany of contributing to economic prosperity, which was foundational for postwar national belonging, it is perhaps not surprising that the first voice to emerge from the guest workers and lay claim to belonging in Germany focused on productivity. The poet Aras Ören initiated what became a new genre of literature; writing from a Marxist perspective, he insisted on the “interconnectedness of workers’ economic and ethnic identities” and “challenged the fundamental dichotomy of native and foreign,” which informed an exclusionary policy on citizenship (Chin 2007, 84).

By the late 1970s, the SPD had made integration a central strategy of policy and Turks began to play a significant symbolic role in discussions about migrants given that they had the largest presence of all incoming groups. The total number of foreigners in 1973 was 3,966,200 and by 1979 there were only 4,143,800; the total number of Turks in 1973 was 893,600 but there 1,268,300 were in 1979 indicating a disproportionate increase in their population versus other groups (Chin 2007, 94). The Christian Democrats’ (CDU) political victory in 1982 and the era of Kohl (Reagan’s German counterpart) marked, however, the beginning of a new period as the CDU did not view integration and enfranchisement as being in their interest as they did not expect to find support among the migrants. During the election, CDU party members argued that the SPD’s integrationist policies had failed; the oppression and victimization of women became indications of the impossibility of integration (Chin 2007, 142-3). Accordingly, there was a shift from discussions on how best to integrate the migrants to whether they had the capacity to integrate at all (Chin 2007, 153). This discursive shift has been criticized as a new racism, which “drew considerable power from its ability both to avoid older, biologically based explanations of

race and to reframe racial distinctions in terms of national and cultural differences” (Chin 2007, 155).

People seeking political asylum formed a second major source of migrants in Germany. As part of West Germany’s recompense for World War II, significant numbers of asylum seekers were allowed into Germany, far outpacing numbers from all other European nations. From fewer than 10,000 asylum seekers in the early 1970s to a peak of 438,200 in 1992, it became difficult to justify the presence of increasing numbers of asylum seekers who appeared to be circumventing the restrictions on migration put in place in 1973 (Bauder 2008a, 97). This contributed to significant civil unrest and violent outbursts and attacks on foreigners primarily in the former East Germany where unification had led to high unemployment. Asylum seekers generally have no rights to work—though they are permitted to work MAEs to supplement their basic income—which makes integration on any meaningful level unlikely.

Notions of a homogenous nation were continuously challenged throughout the 1990s and when the SPD came to power again in 1998 by forming a coalition with the Green Party they vowed to change immigration policy. Similar to their approach to welfare reform (see chapter 2), the SPD assembled the Süssmuth Commission—named after its leader Rita Süssmuth (CDU)—and charged the commission with formulating a sustainable immigration policy. This move was typical of the Schröder administration insofar as it redirected responsibility for controversial policy change to experts who in both this case and the case of the Hartz Commission formulated policy suggestions based entirely on economic justifications and goals. This de-ideologized the policy insofar as it no longer appeared to be premised on party politics but economic necessity.

Harald Bauder’s research on immigration debates that took place in the media and the German parliament suggests that the economic utility of immigrants was discussed more than

any other point. Bauder read 609 newsprint articles for his study, the majority of which tended to portray immigration in a positive light when discussed from an economic vantage point (Bauder 2008a, 104). Interestingly, this is precisely the reverse position that my study of newsprint articles on the One-Euro-Jobs reveals (see chapter 2). While discussion of the economic utility of migrants was consistent across the period involved in the study, discussion of the security risks associated with migrants—particularly Muslim migrants—were sporadic and peaked immediately after the terrorist attack in Madrid in 2004 (Bauder 2008a, 107). Incidentally, it was in the wake of this event that the recommendations from the Süßmuth Commission were not made part of the new immigration law and a more conservative immigration law was adopted. During parliamentary debate, CDU party members argued that immigrants take advantage of the welfare state although, once again, many economic associations with immigration were positive (Bauder and Semmelroggen 2009, 14). The other dominant narrative told in parliamentary debate revolved around Muslims: religion was taken to be the underlying category from which the threat of terrorism, the challenge to constitutional law, and problem of gender inequality emanated (Bauder and Semmelroggen 2009, 13). Interviews with individual parliamentary members revealed less ideologically charged understandings of immigration though there were no major differences between what they said on the parliamentary floor and in anonymous interviews: “Most respondents reiterated the viewpoint expressed in parliamentary debate that immigrants must abide by the law, not strain the welfare system, make an economic contribution and demonstrate an effort to integrate” (Bauder and Semmelroggen 2009, 18).

Bauder further suggests that the more restrictive immigration law that was finally passed should be read in relation to the Hartz reforms to the welfare state, which were passed around the same time: “While in traditional immigration countries vulnerable recent-immigrant workers

serve as a tool of neoliberal labor market regulation, in Germany, the new immigration law asks non-immigrants, rather than new immigrants, to perform the roles of exploitable and flexible labor” (Bauder 2008b, 73). In other words, Bauder argues that Germany attempted to transition its long-term unemployed into low-wage jobs instead of liberalizing its immigration laws and allowing the immigrants and the unemployed to fight over low wages.

While integration was becoming more accepted as a policy strategy in the 1990s, interesting developments were afoot in Germany’s emerging low-wage sector. Germany still had a smaller percentage of workers involved in its low-wage sector (14.3%) than other European countries in 1995, but it was one of only two countries whose low-wage sectors expanded between 1995 and 2000 (Germany’s level increased to 15.3%, exceeding the European average) (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 27).<sup>6</sup> Between 1980 and 1993, the percentage had actually decreased for full-time employment in Germany (15.3% to 13.8%), but that number climbed to 17.3% in 2003 (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 29-30). Given that 75.5% of persons involved in the low-wage sector as of 2003 have completed a career training program (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 32), it can be assumed that many of these persons are employed below their full wage potential and that the sector is extremely competitive. Further, women make up the largest percentage of employees in the low wage sector (64.1%), Germans comprise 89.7% of low-wage workers, and the majority are between 25 and 54 years of age (74.2%) (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 32-33).

The changes in the low wage sector have affected demographic groups differently. Whereas the percentage of employed Germans involved in the low-wage sector decreased between 1980 and 1995 (15.7% to 13.2%), the percentage of employed migrants involved in

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<sup>6</sup> Bosch and Weinkopf use the OECD definition of low wage work, which is work that results in less than 2/3 of the national average. The numbers here don’t count persons working less than 15 hours per week.

such work increased significantly during the same period (14.1% to 23.5% and again to 26.6% in 2003) (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 35). This means that numerous employed migrants experienced a downward shift in their social standing (measured in terms of buying power) during the late 1990s. Reasons for the trend likely include decreases in the number of good paying industrial jobs as well as the incorporation of second generation youth who underperformed in the educational system into the labor market. Across the board, the chances of upward mobility for those involved in the low-wage sector have significantly decreased since the mid-1980s (IAB 2005, 4).

Early statistics charting the effects of One-Euro-Jobs indicate a relatively low success rate. Youth (under the age of 25) were disproportionately more likely to be “challenged” with an MAE: whereas they made up 10.8% of all recipients of Unemployment Benefits II in 2005, they made up 24.6% of those who accepted an MAE that same year (IAB 2008, 1). Youth were likewise the least likely to benefit from the MAE in terms of finding regular employment afterwards; the only segment of youth who benefited at all were young women from West Germany who only increased their likelihood of finding employment by 0.9% (IAB 2008, 6). In general, women were much more likely to benefit from having an MAE than men. Women 25-30 from West Germany increased their odds of finding employment by 4.3%, but the segment of women who improved their chances the most were women with a migratory background living in West Germany (6.8%) (IAB 2008, 6). Many men were less likely to find employment after having an MAE: the only men who improved their chances in a statistically significant way were men from West Germany between the ages of 36 and 50 (1.4%) (IAB 2008, 6). Those living in West Germany were across the board more likely to find employment after an MAE than those living in East Germany.

## II. The new xenophobia

Cynthia Miller-Idriss argues in her recent ethnography *Blood and Culture* that youth (persons born from the late 1970s to early 1980s as she defines the group for her study) are largely refashioning what it means to be German. Rather than conceive of national belonging in biological terms, i.e. blood, they understand it as cultural practice (2009). But there is still a fraction of persons (in her study it amounted to 4 out of 60) that privilege blood over culture as the eminent qualifier for German citizenship (149). Miller-Idriss introduces us, for example, to Jan who had “the most clearly racialized view of citizenship among all of the students [she] interviewed” (150). Jan had this to say about dual citizenship:

What I think about [dual citizenship]—it is absurd. ... Because if you put a Hungarian salami in a refrigerator and then look at it after six years, it's still a Hungarian salami and not a little German sausage. And that's the way it is also, that one can just say, I am indeed a Turk, but now I'm a German, or I will perhaps be both, simply, rather one is born into a community of fate [*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*], and one has to accept that, you can't just write “sheep” on a pig and have it then be a pig. I mean, that's oversimplifying a little, but I mean, that makes the point then. (150)

What Miller-Idriss has to say about this young man's notion of citizenship is, though, as interesting as what he said himself. I quote fully:

It is important to note students' responses could not always be clearly identified as having a “racial” or an “ethnic” or a “cultural” understanding of citizenship because several students expressed multiple viewpoints throughout their interviews or contradicted themselves at some point in the interview, as some of those who initially focused on ethnic elements in talking about national identity later emerged as having a stronger cultural approach, and vice versa. Jan, whose extreme views on Germanness and race became increasingly clear as the interview progressed, for example, stated in one of the first responses in the interview that “the term ‘citizen’ is not connected to any particular heritage,” thus initially indicating that he does not understand citizenship in ethnic terms. Over the course of the next several interview questions, however, his responses revealed just the opposite, showing that he

conceives of citizenship as an essential and biologically embedded part of an individual. According to Jan, it is no more possible to change one's citizenship than it is for a pig to become a sheep. (150-151)

To summarize: Miller-Idriss assumes that Jan contradicts himself insofar as he indicates that citizenship is not a matter of heritage, on the one hand, and that citizenship is biologically embedded, on the other. What Miller-Idriss identifies as a contradiction on the part of Jan, however, is likely a miscommunication that occurs between the two on the basis of conflicting understandings of racial or ethnic identities. In order to unravel this miscommunication, it is necessary to clarify how Miller-Idriss defines race and ethnicity for the purposes of her study.<sup>7</sup> “I have classified students’ and teachers’ responses as reflecting a racial understanding of citizenship when their definitions of citizenship rely on genetic criteria or phenotypical and physical features, such as skin tone” (45). “I classify students’ and teachers’ conceptions of citizenship as ‘ethnic’ when they rely on the German notion of Volk or on the notion of German heritage (*Herkunft, Ursprung, or deutsche Vorfahren*) in their definitions of German citizenship but do not explicitly reference physical appearance, racial categories, or genetic differences” (45). Of importance is the historical orientation of these notions of race and ethnicity whether in terms of biological history or some other essentialized past. Jan’s use of ethnicity, however, appears to have a future orientation, which is perhaps why the analogies he discusses (sausage and livestock) are narrated around becoming: it is less important that Hungarian sausage comes from Hungary than it is that Hungarian sausage is destined to be Hungarian sausage regardless of how long it’s in the refrigerator.

Jan’s notion of national belonging is in all probability neither contradictory nor right wing. Much more likely is that he is drawing on the rhetoric of Oskar Lafontaine, currently a

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<sup>7</sup> It should perhaps be noted that Miller-Idriss recognizes the constructedness of these categories.

leader of The Left Party (*Die Linke*). Beginning with a speech he gave in Chemnitz in 2005,<sup>8</sup> Lafontaine has articulated a position that is opposed to “foreigners” stealing jobs and “Arabs” overrunning the country, on the one hand, and in favor of withdrawing citizenship rights to those not entirely proficient in the German language and who don’t support the state with taxes, on the other (2006).<sup>9</sup> As concerns the above quoted miscommunication, it is important to note Lafontaine’s use of “community of fate” (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*) does not necessarily rely on heritage in the same way that the term was used under National Socialism—along with the term “community of blood” (*Blutgemeinschaft*)—to justify and legitimate the Holocaust. This does not make Lafontaine’s position any less problematic than right-wing articulations of belonging but it does force us to reconsider a common division of the political landscape in Germany “between the antiforeigner right and the antinationalist left” (Miller-Idriss 2009, 11). So too, while Miller-Idriss’s focus on “how citizenship and national belonging are lived and practiced among ordinary citizens” (42) grounds her important insight that no single notion of national belonging can be assumed across generations within a single nation-state (29), her study entails a blind side: an exclusive focus on “the everyday” obscures the relation between common practice and widely disseminated political rhetoric.

What’s interesting about the above exchange, then, is that it indexes an important rupture that occurred regarding how belonging in Germany could be conceived: it’s now possible to articulate positions that are racist, xenophobic, or both without relying exclusively on essentialized histories of nations. In the rest of this chapter, I will trace this development across the political rhetoric of Oskar Lafontaine and Thilo Sarrazin.

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<sup>8</sup> Chemnitz is a large city in the southwest corner of the former East Germany; it has long been a center of industrial production.

<sup>9</sup> I place *foreigners* and *Arabs* in quotes to call attention to the fact that this is Lafontaine’s terminology, *Ausländer* and *Araben* in the original.

In 1993, an article in *Der Spiegel* featured a conversation between Oskar Lafontaine (then still a member of the SPD) and Edmund Stoiber (CSU) in which the two debated the shifting parameters of national belonging in relation to European integration.<sup>10</sup> The debate serves as an ideal point to diagnose and assess the emergence of a split between notions of national belonging that do and don't refer to a common history. Broadly speaking, Stoiber is concerned about the authority that Germany as a nation-state stands to lose through the "monstrous centralization involved in a federalist configuration of Europe." Lafontaine, on the other hand, sees Europe as the solution to problems the nation-state is no longer able to solve and counters that Stoiber is clinging to an "antiquated" notion of the state: "there is a tendency toward larger unities of governmental organization. The nation-state that you are conjuring has been rendered obsolete and can no longer solve the current problems: economic policy, labor market, guiding the financial markets, fighting crime, migration movements, and ecology. That's why we aren't giving up on a United States of Europe." Stoiber is less optimistic: "At what point does the perfection of Europe place our independence in question? Europe as such can be dear and valuable, but it can never become a "father land" (*Vaterland*) that substitutes for our national father lands."

For Lafontaine, though, the economic and social integration that has already occurred precludes such a state: "without its own monetary policy and its own army, the old nation-state no longer exists." We hear of course echoes from postwar definitions of national identity: in the immediate aftermath of World War II, currency reform constituted a foundational experience and lynchpin for new, de-nazified notions of national belonging. With the introduction of a common currency, Lafontaine implies, the nation-state will lose some of the glue that holds it together.

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<sup>10</sup> "Europa ist kein Vaterland," *Der Spiegel* 50, 1993.

Stoiber, on the other hand, foresees the downfall of a particular configuration of authority premised on the ideal of a homogenous nation subsumed under a single father-state.

Having given up traditional notions of the nation-state, Lafontaine seeks out new possibilities for national belonging:

The nation is for me a community of birth (*Geburtsgemeinschaft*). You from the CDU/CSU speak—contrary to all other Europeans—of a community of descent (*Abstammungsgemeinschaft*) and community of blood (*Blutgemeinschaft*).

Stoiber: For me the nation is a grown (*gewachsen*), historical community of fate (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*).

Lafontaine: the German nation was never in this sense settled (*beheimatet*) in a state. We were as a nation constantly searching for a state form. I'm thinking of Bismarck and the German Federation. When you say nation and state are not identical then we'll made some progress.

Stoiber: In the ideal case, nation and state are identical. As regards Germany, that's not true. That's why we have to organize the representation of the interests of German minorities outside of our state borders, in for example Russia and Poland. Europe will certainly not be able to devote itself so strongly to our interests. You're passing over the feeling and longing of a great majority with your position. You're making people anxious.

Lafontaine: You're stuck on a traditional, ethnic (*völkisch*) understanding of the state, which assumes that nation and people (*Volk*) are a unity. The German speaking child of a Turkish family who's been living here for three generations isn't German according to your concept of nations, but the child born in Kazakhstan whose family has lived there for seven generations and doesn't know any German is. This great error is the reason why you're not able to come up with a reasonable integration policy and a reasonable understanding of nations.

Lafontaine's clear departure here from a straightforward ethnic nationalism is marked with his notion of a community of birth, which he wants to differentiate from Stoiber's traditional notion of an organic unity between state and nation. More recently, Lafontaine has focused on the term "community of fate" (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*)—a term that Stoiber uses here to refer to an

ethnically homogeneous nation—instead of “community of birth.” The switch is part of some of the larger changes that Lafontaine has made since his split from the SPD in 1999. In 2005, Lafontaine joined the Election Alternative for Social Justice (WASG)—a party consisting of disgruntled SPD politicians and union members who left the SPD over the Hartz reforms. Lafontaine was instrumental in building a bridge between the WASG and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which consisted primarily of members of the Socialist Union Party (SED) of the former East Germany. The party Lafontaine helped forge out of the WASG and the PDS is now the Left Party (Die Linke). As a member of the Left Party, Lafontaine has not shied away from borrowing rhetoric from the radical right in order to win support among disaffected voters in the east.

Thilo Sarrazin has also dabbled with arguments that occasionally sound as if they belonged among the radical right. His interview in *Lettre International* in 2009 caused an uproar, which didn't end until well after his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does itself in) had been published, which extended many of the views he expressed in the interview. One of the most controversial lines in the interview had to do with the place of Arabs and Turks in Berlin: “A large number of Arabs and Turks in this city—whose numbers have grown through bad policy—have no productive function outside of fruit and vegetable sales, and a new perspective probably won't come about” (Sarrazin 2009, 198). The preceding sentences—far less controversial—are in this context, though, just as interesting: “[Berlin] has a productive rotation of people who have work and are needed, whether they're civil servants or government officials. On the other hand, it has some people—about 20% of the population—who aren't economically needed, 20% live from Hartz IV and aid money; nationwide it's only 8 to 10%” (198). Again,

what's interesting is the proximity of xenophobia with classism, which only becomes more and more pronounced throughout the interview.

Sarrazin began the interview by mourning the “intellectual bloodletting” (*geistigen Aderlaß*) of Berlin—“the enormous Jewish bloodletting that can never be compensated for” (197). The usage here of “blood” has an uncanny resonance in the context of a conversation that has unmistakable nationalist overtones, which seem to be premised on blood-based notions of belonging that were obviously central to the loss of the Jews in the first place. But there is a place for Jews according to Sarrazin because of their assumed education. Berliners, on the other hand, take on the function of the single black mother on welfare in America: “Vienna was a dynamic city that had to compete in the capitalist market; in Berlin there sat a fattened subvention recipient who first had to be accustomed to reality through the pains of withdrawal (*Entzugsschmerzen*)” (197). What Sarrazin is here referring to is the way in which West Germany subsidized Berliners during the Cold War in order to maintain the semblance of prosperity in the face of East Germany. Accordingly, Berliners were excused from the salutary discipline of the market.

In February 2008, Sarrazin (then Berlin Senator for Finances) advocated a 3-day meal plan, which his office had assembled, as a guide for Hartz IV recipients. According to Sarrazin, reasonable nourishment can cost less than 4 Euro a day, whereas Hartz IV hypothetically provides 4.25 Euro a day for food.<sup>11</sup> The menu included, for example spaghetti Bolognese, which consisted of 100g hamburger, 125g spaghetti, 200g tomato sauce, and a bit of spice and

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<sup>11</sup> The Sarrazin meal plan received a tremendous amount of media coverage. See, for example, Gilbert Schomaker, “Sarrazin Entwickelt Hartz-IV-Speiseplan,” *Die Welt*, 8 February 2008.

oil—all of which cost only 1.03 Euro. The average daily caloric intake based on Sarrazin’s plan was 1,550.<sup>12</sup>

Sarrazin’s rhetoric often sounds similar to that of New Gingrich, which I will analyze in the following chapter, insofar as he stresses personal responsibility in overcoming dependence on state subsidy. “Integration is an achievement of those who integrate themselves” (Sarrazin 2009, 199). What’s different, though, is the way in which Sarrazin seeks to disenfranchise anyone receiving unemployment: “I don’t need to recognize anyone who does nothing. I don’t have to recognize anyone who lives from the state, who rejects this state, doesn’t reasonably plan for the education of his children, and constantly produces new, little head-scarf-girls” (199). As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Sarrazin slips seamlessly between the Muslim and the Berliner, both of whom are according to Sarrazin unwilling to integrate themselves. The point at which the discourse breaks down in blatant contradiction is of course the point at which Sarrazin describes the unemployed as “not economically needed” and yet unwilling to integrate whereby the market is understood as both redeemer and excommunicator at the same time.

## **Conclusion**

Returning now to *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben argues that it is glory that sits in the empty center around which the dual structure of modern government spins like a machine. In its present guise, glory is public opinion generated in and through modern mass media. “As had always been the case in profane and ecclesiastic liturgies, this supposedly ‘originary democratic phenomenon’ is once again caught, oriented, and manipulated in the forms and according to the strategies of spectacular power” (Agamben 2011, 256). Sarrazin is a master of mass media. The last question posed in the quoted interview in fact concerned his relationship to it: “The media

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<sup>12</sup> The calculation is not mine. See Heiner Geissler, “Darf Sarrazin Arbeitslose folgenlos verhöhnen?,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, 13 February 2008.

love it when there's a ruckus. They think that's great, also when it's entertaining. When one offers both and gives the impression of knowing his stuff, one eventually receives a relatively high acceptance from the media—even for controversial positions” (Sarrazin 2009, 201).

Sarrazin had offered a stunning performance in that interview and he clearly was fully aware of the portions of it that would be controversial and appalling to many. The danger does not so much appear to me to be the most infuriating of the remarks (such as the line previously quoted about “head-scarf-girls”). The danger appears to me to lie in those moments when he's far more subtle, when even a careful reader can sit back and quietly nod at the plausibility of this or that argument.

Was Anonymisieren betrifft, wir haben grundsätzlich nichts zu verbergen. Aber es gibt natürlich heikle Bereiche...  
(As concerns anonymity, we have—in principle—nothing to hide. But there are of course delicate areas...)

-Director of a Socio-cultural Center

## 2. The Rhetoric of Reform and the Rise of Popular Ideology

### Introduction

My apartment in Berlin, early 2009. I was cold calling organizations that I anticipated to be participating in Germany's workfare program—the Working Opportunities with Additional Cost Compensation or MAEs (*Arbeitsgelegenheiten mit Mehraufwandentschädigung*). The plan was to set up interviews with administrators so that they might familiarize me with the relevant geographies, projects, and people involved in workfare. Given that long-term unemployment is a sensitive issue, I hoped that these administrators would ease me slowly into a world in which I had no obvious function. The plan still sounds reasonable.

I had assembled a list of non-profit organizations, many of which were Socio-cultural Centers (*Soziokulturelle Zentren*), in and around Prenzlauerberg where I was living.<sup>13</sup> I introduced myself and my project and asked if someone might be available to discuss how the workfare positions fit into the organization and its goals. Happily, I found a handful of persons who were willing to answer whatever questions I had. But I also encountered a number of different and, for me at the time, totally baffling responses in which I quickly became the interrogated. The central question seemed to be *who had commissioned my work*—as if the cold

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<sup>13</sup> MAEs are arranged in relation to the local job market, which means that MAEs in Berlin are predominantly service-oriented as opposed to industrial or technical. Accordingly, my focus on Socio-cultural Centers, which might include a museum or gallery, offer programs for youth, or provide day care services, is not coincidental.

war had not in fact ended and I was pursuing classified information. Always slightly embarrassed, I explained again and again that this was my dissertation project (a point I always mentioned up front anyway), that I had chosen the topic myself, and on and on. Some of the responses to the cold calling were so intense that I decided to give up the method and so began canvassing the organizations in person. I had some success that way, too, but again there were a number of curious incidences. Occasionally, I was promised interviews and told to call back to set up an appointment, at which point communication broke down. You have no idea how many people in Berlin still owe me a call. Even more interesting was the interview with an administrator who had no problem talking to me anonymously but wouldn't sign the permission form for the interview, which is of course required by the Institutional Review Board. She fundamentally refused to have her name, specifically her signature, connected to an interview concerning the MAEs—regardless of who would or would not see the form.

Communicative difficulties emerged in other contexts as well, such as at a two-day seminar in Rostock on Social Law Book II (*SGB II*), which regulates the workfare programs. Since the group of attendees was rather small, we introduced ourselves in turn and explained why we were there. During one of the breaks, a social worker indicated that she hadn't quite understood what my interest in the seminar was. So I began to explain that I was writing my dissertation on the MAEs and as soon as I said that I realized the point of misunderstanding. "You know, the One-Euro-Jobs." "*Ohh*," she said. What struck me about this experience was the fact that I had to employ the terminology of the critics of welfare reform in order to communicate in a professional context.

All of these misunderstandings weren't so much a problem with my skills in speaking German as they were a problem with me not appropriating the expected terminology and hence

the stance towards the Hartz reforms that it implied.<sup>14</sup> As an Anthropologist, I'm trained to be sensitive to language and what it achieves, which is why I never relied heavily on obviously derogatory terms like "One-Euro-Jobs." But this move towards a more neutral register marked me as suspicious, for it was no longer possible to discern where I stood on the relevant matters and, accordingly, where I stood in relation to the person with whom I was speaking. Toward the end of one of my first interviews, the director of a Socio-cultural Center warned that I would again and again run up against difficulties with this project. It was a rather prophetic moment. "You really picked something out for yourself, my friend." I didn't quite get it at the time, so I asked him what he meant. "This is all so emotionalized now that 70% will suspect you of being a snitch from the Job Center—when you call somewhere and say you want to talk about One-Euro-Jobs. And the other 30% will think, *why's he doing this?* So this will be insanely difficult, you know." And it often was, as I say.

Central to why it was so difficult not only to discuss Germany's workfare programs in neutral terms but to find persons implicated in this system who were willing to participate in my ethnographic inquiry was that the "grand project became a grand failure" (Patzwaldt 2008, 10). As I will argue in this chapter, the "grand failure" had more to do with the rhetorical shortcomings of the reforms than anything else. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) had been losing ground in parliamentary elections since 1998 (from 40.9% of the vote in 1998 to 34.2% in 2005). But their worst election results in the post-war period came in 2009 when they took only

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<sup>14</sup> The reforms that transformed Germany's welfare state into a workfare state are commonly referred to as the "Hartz reforms," named after Peter Hartz, once a manager at Volkswagon, who went on to lead the Hartz Commission, which developed the Hartz Concept, which provided the basic principles of the Hartz reforms. In terms of political rhetoric, this line of names constitutes the Social Democratic Party's greatest success insofar as they are not associated by name with the infamous reforms. I will elaborate on this below.

23% of the vote.<sup>15</sup> Curiously, it was between 2005 and 2009 that their labor market policies had been most successful—at least in terms of unemployment statistics (after climbing from 11.7% in 2004 to 13% in 2005, unemployment fell to just 8.2% in 2009). Despite the lowest unemployment rates in Germany since the post-unification boom, voters in Berlin were largely split between the Christian Democrats and the Left Party, a constitutive component of which came from previous SPD politicians and supporters who left the party over disagreements with the Hartz reforms. In short, the political legacy of the Hartz reforms appears to be a substantially stronger right and left—so much for the Middle Way in Germany.

My primary interest here, though, is not the political consequences of the reform rhetoric but the socio-cultural ones. In the first section of this chapter, I will show how the political strategies and reform rhetoric of Gerhard Schröder and the SPD beginning in the late 1990s opened the discursive possibility for a critical response to welfare reform that now functions as the dominant cultural framework surrounding the new workfare state. I will develop this analysis alongside a discussion of governmentality, which has been a key theoretical trajectory in confronting shifts like welfare reform associated with neoliberalism. Given that it was precisely the rhetoric of reform that did not become hegemonic in Germany, the Hartz reforms provoke us to reconsider some basic assumptions about the power and influence of the state and its relation to knowledge production as theorized in studies of governmentality. In the following chapter, I further develop a psychoanalytic approach for explaining how individuals become invested in social practice (or disinvested as is often the case with MAEs), which will further complicate my discussion of governmentality. So too, my analysis of the cultural framework surrounding the

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<sup>15</sup> I am referring here to the “second” half of the parliamentary vote based not on individual candidates but party votes. “Bundestagswahlergebnisse seit 1949—Zweitstimmen,” accessed 21 April 2011, [http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/wahlen/ergebnisse\\_seit1949.html](http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/wahlen/ergebnisse_seit1949.html).

Hartz reforms will lead us to question the claim that the state holds a monopoly on symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999).

The difficulties I encountered while setting up an ethnographic investigation into the MAEs prompted me to consider the media (primarily sources from journalism but also television documentaries) as an important disseminator of the assumptions and oppositions of the cultural context surrounding and guiding German welfare reform. The second section of this chapter focuses on those findings. In short, I will argue that the state operates within a cultural framework to which they often contribute but don't intentionally control in any convincing fashion. While I'm not in the business of prognostication, in the conclusion of this chapter I will discuss how the current cultural context supports a far more thorough withdrawal of the state from this sphere and, hence, a possible second phase of welfare reform that might prove to be more properly neoliberal than all that has preceded it.

## **I. Governance and the rhetoric of reform**

Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller's essay "Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government" (1992; reprinted in 2009) offers an incisive and influential account of discourse and its relation to governance. Drawing heavily on the work of Michel Foucault (1980 and 1991; in particular), Rose and Miller argue that "power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom" (1992, 174). Further, "this citizenship is to be manifested not in the receipt of public largesse, but in the energetic pursuit of personal fulfillment and the incessant calculations that are to enable this to be achieved" (201). Accordingly, governance relies on political rationalities that formulate "idealized schemata for representing reality, analyzing it, and rectifying it" whereby these forms of rationality achieve a "characteristically moral form" (178). In short, then, Rose and Miller

argue that the central operation of governance—and hence the key to understanding how power operates in relations of domination—lies in mobilizing behavioral norms on the basis of knowledge production and policy implementation such that the subjects of governance internalize these norms and further operate obediently without additional forms of violence or coercion.

Evidence of the ideal of a self-motivating, personal-interest-pursuing, and self-regulating citizenry abounds in the political and technical discussions that led up to and constitute the Hartz reforms. In 1999, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder claimed that “the true test for society is how efficiently [public] expenditures are used and to what extent they put people in position to help themselves.”<sup>16</sup> The report of the Hartz Commission continued by making “the provocation of spontaneous activities” (*Eigenaktivitäten auslösen*) a cornerstone of its “activating labor market policy” (2002, 45). When Schröder introduced Agenda 2010 in a speech before the Bundestag on 14 March 2003, he had similar things to say: “We will have to reduce state benefits, advocate (*fördern*) self-responsibility, and require more personal contribution.” In summary, the persons responsible for constructing and implementing the Hartz reforms explicitly mobilized a rhetoric that sounded, following Rose and Miller’s definition, quintessentially neoliberal, whereby “the political subject is less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body than an individual whose citizenship is active” (1992, 201). The resemblances are so similar, it were as if Blair and Schröder were quoting from Rose and Miller.

Despite political rhetoric that invokes the ideal of an active citizenry, recent scholarship indicates that a strong disciplinary apparatus has been required in order to implement the transition from welfare to workfare in both the United States and Europe (Wacquant, 2009; Soss,

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<sup>16</sup> Here and in what follows, I will quote primarily from the English version of Blair and Schröder’s programmatic statement “The Third Way / Die neue Mitte.” The English and German versions depart only occasionally and subtly from each other and I can discern no significant differences for my analysis.

Fording, and Schram 2011). A key tactic involved in this transition has been to place constraints on welfare benefits such that persons are more or less forced to accept a job or participate in a workfare program. In instances of noncompliance, then, the ideal of an active citizen must be imposed.<sup>17</sup> And it is perhaps not surprising that studies exist indicating the effectiveness of sanctions, for example, in motivating individuals to accept employment (Abbring, van den Berg, and van Ours 2005; Lalive, van Ours, and Zweimüller 2008). To the extent, though, that external force is necessary to initiate and maintain certain behavior, not only has the ideal of an active citizen not been achieved, but the moral framework of the otherwise noncompliant person has not been altered or manipulated in a way that would mark them as subjects of neoliberal rationalities. For all of the clearly neoliberal rhetoric that Schröder and company spouted in the years leading up to the Hartz reforms, it remains a question as to whether or not this talk amounted to a discourse with “willing” subjects or not. And that is an important point; the subject in its Foucauldian sense is always a willing participant even if alternatives may not appear readily available.

To summarize my position thus far, there is relatively little indication that simply disseminating certain values about the citizenry or even building a legal and institutional conglomeration to uphold them can guarantee that individuals will internalize the values. Accordingly, a general weakness of Rose and Miller’s approach lies in its inability to explain adequately how and why subjects actually become self-activating and self-regulating in ways amenable to the objectives of governance.

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<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting in this regard that the computers of placement officers (*Arbeitsvermittler*) in Berlin’s Job Centers have panic buttons, which notify security and fellow colleagues of situations that get out of hand. A placement officer indicated to me in an interview that there were a number of instances in which these devices were used during the initial period of implementing the policy of activation.

I would like to turn now to a brief comparison of American and German welfare reform rhetoric so as to clarify why the Blair/Schröder program did not become hegemonic in determining how we speak of welfare in Germany, but rather left the door open for the critical discourse to do so. In the United States, conservatives have skillfully used language since the late 1960s as an essential weapon in their assault on the post-war welfare state. William Safire, one of America's most prolific and celebrated snoots,<sup>18</sup> was working as a speech writer for Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew when he introduced the term "workfare" into the debate on welfare reform (Safire 1988). Nixon liked the term and used it in a 1969 speech that's worth quoting. "In the final analysis, we cannot talk our way out of poverty; we cannot legislate our way out of poverty, but this nation can work its way out of poverty. What America needs now is not more welfare, but more 'workfare.'"<sup>19</sup> Important here is that a powerful and benevolent "we" is invoked, which is defined in very simple terms: either you are *working* with "us" to defeat poverty or you are *not working* and thereby contributing to poverty. Rhetorically, this is cleverly devious in as much as it implies that welfare recipients themselves are to blame for poverty. Hence poverty is no longer "our" problem, but "theirs." Further, "we" can feel all the better about this social organization insofar as "we" are "together" working towards solving poverty; it's just that "they" aren't working with "us."

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<sup>18</sup> David Foster Wallace brought the term "snoot" into public usage in his essay "Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Wars over Usage" (2001), which was reprinted later as "Authority and American Usage" (2005). Bryan Garner subsequently included an entry for it in his *Modern American Usage* (2009, 756), saying that "the word denotes a well-informed language-lover and word connoisseur." It was, nevertheless, Wallace's point that usage is fundamentally a matter of politics. When I say, then, that William Safire was a snoot, I mean that he wrote with great attention to linguistic convention so as to achieve his political ends in an effective manner. My larger point here is that the relative snootitude of welfare reformers is tremendously important.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Peck (1998, 137).

Newt Gingrich mobilized a similar us-them schema when discussing welfare reform, though he expanded the category of the outsider or enemy to include Democrats.<sup>20</sup> More concretely, he assembled a list of contrasting words that could be used to distinguish Republicans from Democrats and instructed incoming Republicans in their use of the terms. Here is a selection of those words that are pertinent to our discussion:

change	red tape
opportunity	decay
challenge	waste
truth	lie
active(ly)	destructive
empower(ment)	impose
freedom	coercion
workfare	welfare
incentive	taxes
initiative	unionized bureaucracy <sup>21</sup>

Two points are central. First, Gingrich draws specifically on linguistic oppositions to extend the us-them dichotomy into an essentially infinite number of situations. Whatever the topic, one could mobilize these oppositions to spin it into a dividing line between “us” and “them.” Second, to the extent that these oppositions can be mobilized to justify policy changes, that justification would tend to rely on a moral basis. In other words, Gingrich and the Republicans are in no way dependent on scientific facts or terminology to justify their politics. Rather, this schema draws more or less exclusively on a division between good and evil, which can be articulated in everyday language.

A close look at Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder’s “The Third Way / Die neue Mitte” reveals a very different approach to justifying the need for welfare reform. First of all, they don’t define their party and policies in relation to an external enemy and this appears to be a rhetorical consequence of their claim that they constitute a “universal party.” As they say, “most people

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<sup>20</sup> That Gingrich “mastered the media” with a “studied...use of supercharged symbolic language” (New York Times, 14 Dec. 1994) is something that quite simply will never be said of the German reformers.

<sup>21</sup> Selection taken from Newt Gingrich, “Language: A Key Mechanism of Control.”

have long since abandoned the world view represented by the dogmas of left and right.” While this may appear self-aggrandizing—in terms of political rhetoric—it leads to the problem of having to situate the cause of poverty and unemployment within the party itself. That is, rhetorically negating the validity of any competing political parties also precludes using another party as a scapegoat. So the direction of the SPD (as well as the Labour Party) had to be defined in terms of an inner tension. “Although both parties can be proud of our historic achievements, today we must develop realistic and feasible answers to new challenges confronting our societies and economies. This requires adherence to our values but also a willingness to change our old approaches and traditional policy instruments.” This is a very different “we” than Nixon’s “we.” Here the “we” is fundamentally at odds with itself insofar as its current direction must depart from its otherwise defining values. Both the SPD and the Labour party thereby become rhetorically caught between their own history and the economic need to “modernize.” As I mentioned, this tension (in Germany) led directly to strengthening the left as an entire wing of the SPD broke off in protest to form the Electoral Alternative: Labor and Social Justice (WASG), which later combined with the Democratic Socialists (PDS) to form the Left Party (die Linke). Running strongly on a platform calling for the annulment of Hartz-IV, the Left Party gained 3.2% more votes in 2009 against their performance in 2005.

Beyond merely defining their parties in opposition to their own party histories and hence rhetorically highlighting inner-party tension, Blair and Schröder also employ a “we” that is fraught with an irresolvable social tension. Consider, for example, this passage from the Middle Way speech.

Too often rights were elevated above responsibilities, but the responsibility of the individual to his or her family, neighborhood and society cannot be offloaded on to the state. If the concept of mutual obligation is forgotten, this results in a decline in community spirit, lack

of responsibility towards neighbors, rising crime and vandalism, and a legal system that cannot cope.

If the previous party line was that working folk have a responsibility to guarantee a decent standard of living across the collective “we” by contributing to unemployment insurance and a welfare state, then a substitution occurs here. Instead of working individuals upholding the collective “we,” it is now the unemployed who are responsible to the collective in that they need to support themselves, their families, and so on. On some level, we might take this as a clever substitution whereby old party rhetoric is spun to accommodate a call for welfare reform. But the rhetoric fails to form a cohesive ideological “we.” As long as the “we” is constituted by individuals in their mutual obligations to each other, it still makes sense to assert the old party line. In other words, the new rhetoric does not rule out the old question (it in fact implies it): what about the responsibility of the working to the non-working?

Blair and Schröder’s economic justification of welfare reform had two strengths worth considering more closely. Modernizing politics in their view was a matter of “adapting to objectively altered conditions.” For, “in much of Europe,” they argued, “unemployment is far too high—and a high proportion of it is structural. To address this challenge, Europe’s Social Democrats must together formulate and implement a new supply-side agenda for the left.”<sup>22</sup> As I have suggested, not mobilizing the rhetoric of an enemy inimical to the social order ultimately weakened the rhetorical force of the Middle Way. But the move toward a more objective justification of welfare reform was likely part of a strategy to avoid the problems of adversarial politics that prevented previous administrations from passing sweeping reform. As Gerhard Lehbruch explains, “Schröder developed a leadership style fundamentally different from his

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<sup>22</sup> Schröder made the same point in his speech to the Bundestag that introduced Agenda 2010 on 13 March 2003. “Germany must... struggle with a weak growth, which has structural causes. The incidental wage costs have reached a sum... that functions as a hindrance on the side of the employer to create more work.”

predecessor's. Whereas Kohl had finally deadlocked himself in a polarized party system, Schröder undertook to shift political decisions from the party arena to extra-parliamentary consensus building" (2003, 164). In this limited sense, then, the rhetoric of the Middle Way was effective insofar as it didn't alienate other parties, which were needed to pass the reform.

Although numerous reasons exist for questioning an approach to labor policy based supply-side economics (too many in fact to list here),<sup>23</sup> it lent the Middle Way a neutral character that isn't entirely problematic. Clearly, the Republican us-them dichotomy stigmatized welfare recipients as the cause of "their own" poverty and hence "our" social burden. Sanford Schram offers a convincing critical analysis of this aspect of reform rhetoric in the United States (1995) but he has also argued that the activation discourses of European welfare reform stigmatize welfare recipients as passive and undeserving (2006, 39; see also 26). Schram thereby fails to appreciate the way in which activation discourses avoided precisely this problem of stigmatization. As the above quote indicates, the unemployed are not unemployed because they are lazy (as implied in the Republican rhetoric) but because they are victims of invasive politics that stymied the creative entrepreneur or made it too expensive to hire more employees. That, at any rate, is the logic of Blair, Schröder, the Hartz Commission, and others. Evidence from my ethnographic research supports my point here. Consider what this workfare participant explained her lack of a guilty conscience regarding her dependence on the state: "the Club of Rome said it already at the end of the '70s, they said, people, full employment will never exist. Unemployment has structural origins. And, in that regard, I don't have a guilty conscience to need the Job Center."

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<sup>23</sup> The notion that unemployment in Europe was higher than in the United States on account of labor market rigidities has been enormously influential in terms of shaping policy. For a thorough critique of this view, see the essays in Gregory, Salverda, and Schettkat (2007).

In this section, I have skirted around the question of ideology and I would like to conclude my discussion of the political rhetoric leading up to the Hartz reforms by confronting it more directly. Claude Lefort develops an analysis of ideology under totalitarianism that is particularly relevant for the political rhetoric that forms the object of this study:

The attempt to ensure [ideology's] mastery of the social space is supported by the representation of the enemy: an enemy who cannot be presented as an opponent, but whose existence strikes at the integrity of the social body... In a society which does not tolerate the image of an internal social division, which claims that it is homogeneous despite all the differences which exist in fact, it is the other as such who acquires the fantastic features of the destroyer; the other, however he is defined, to whatever group he belongs, is the representative of the *outside*... Totalitarian ideology is maintained by the exclusion of an evil agent, a representative of the anti-social. (1986, 223)

At stake is the unity of the social and, Lefort argues, ideology overcomes its fundamental fracture by creating an external sphere that can safely accommodate antagonism.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, the Republican rhetoric that ushered in welfare reform in the United States performs this precise operation. It sanctifies the social “we” by ejecting antagonistic individuals unwilling to cooperate with an industrious “us.” The rhetoric of the Middle Way, on the other hand, situates the antagonism within the Social Democratic party itself insofar as it must reject its previous policies in favor of new ones appropriate to the current economic situation. As I will argue below, the critical discourse reinstates a harmonious whole (working and non-working persons existing in cooperative interdependence) by rejecting the state as a malevolent influence on that whole.

## II. From political rhetoric to legal and institutional rhetoric

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<sup>24</sup> Alexei Yurchak focuses on a slightly different aspect of Lefort's work, which he terms “Lefort's paradox.” “To fulfill its political function of reproducing power, the ideological discourse must claim to represent an ‘objective truth’ that exists outside of it; however, the external nature of this ‘objective truth’ renders the ideological discourse inherently lacking in the means to describe it in total, which can ultimately undermine this discourse's legitimacy and the power that supports it” (2005, 10).

Often both the most invested supporters and the most vehement critics of welfare reform in Germany focus on a single point: Hartz IV combined what were two distinct social assistance programs in the previous system: Unemployment Assistance (*Arbeitslosenhilfe*, which was based on one's previous earnings and thus previous standard of living) and Social Assistance (*Sozialhilfe*, which was based on the minimum requirements for subsistence). In a year-end report from 2005, the Federal Employment Agency described the transformation in this way: "With the formation of the ARGEs [an official legal term for what in Berlin and many other municipalities are called Job Centers; it stands for *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (consortium)] as a single point of contact for all earning-capable, assistance-requiring persons, Germany paved a new entry to benefits and advancement offerings." For the reforms many critics, this change also embodied the singular intent of the Hartz reforms, which they took to be the retrenchment of the welfare state. To this extent, Schröder's call for a slimmer and more efficient social state coincided with how the Hartz reforms were generally understood.

Despite the fact that a retrenchment discourse had existed in Germany since the Kohl era (Lessenich 2008, 12), there was no indication that the reformers took this critical discourse as a legitimate threat to their policy agenda. In fact, there is a way in which proponents of the reforms played directly into the hands of their critics. For, as I say, the reformers characterized the changes repeatedly in terms of bringing together Unemployment Assistance and Social Assistance. In other words, they characterized their reforms as a reduction and simplification of the welfare state. As Schröder said in his speech introducing Agenda 2010, "We will have to trim services of the state, support self-responsibility, and require the self-help of each individual." Hypothetically, Schröder and company could have discussed the reforms in a way that didn't so clearly fit into the main argument of opponents to welfare reform, i.e. that the welfare state was

being dismantled. Proponents of reform could have argued that they were dramatically expanding the services of the Federal Employment Agency insofar as they extended job placement services to the long-term unemployed who had been receiving Social Assistance in the prior system. Important, though, for my argument is simply the point that anxiety concerning the dismantling of the welfare state played a role in welfare debate well prior to the emergence of the Middle-Way rhetoric. Schröder, however, appears to have disregarded whatever cultural significance there was to this anxiety.

That the federal government has no single, official term for the activities commonly referred to as One-Euro-Jobs appears to me to be an extension of the political disregard for the ideological function that welfare rhetoric plays. *SGB II*, §16d outlines the working opportunities, so we can begin there.

For earning-capable, assistance-requiring persons who are unable to find work, work opportunities (*Arbeitsgelegenheiten*) are to be created. If opportunities for works, which lie in the public interest and are supplemental (*zusätzlich*), are supported (*gefördert*), then an adequate compensation for additional expenditures (*Entschädigung für Mehraufwendungen*) is to be paid to the earning-capable, assistance-requiring persons in addition to Unemployment Benefits II; these works do not constitute a work relationship in the sense of worker rights...<sup>25</sup>

The Agency for Labor interprets the first clause as the legal basis for Working Opportunities of the Payment Variety (*Arbeitsgelegenheiten in der Entgeltvariante*, AGH-E) and the second clause as the basis for Working Opportunities with Additional Cost Compensation (*Arbeitsgelegenheiten mit Mehraufwandsentschädigung* or at times *Arbeitsgelegenheiten in der Mehraufwandsvariante*, AGH-MAE).<sup>26</sup> The legal differences between the two working

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<sup>25</sup> I am quoting from the *Sozialgesetzbuch* as of 1 January 2009. In 2011, “Hilfbedürftige” (assistance-requiring person) was stricken (to the best of my knowledge) from the entire book and changed to “Leistungsberechtigte” (service beneficiary or, more literally, person with the right to services).

<sup>26</sup> I am following here the Federal Employment Agency’s recommendations for the implementation of Working Opportunities as articulated in its *Arbeitshilfen AGH*, which are something like CliffsNotes for the Job Centers,

opportunities are, likewise, rather straight forward. Whereas an AGH-MAE does not constitute a legal working relation between the employer and employee (non-contractual), the AGH-E does. Whereas AGH-MAEs must be supplemental and in the public interest, AGH-Es need not be either, though they can be.

I based my own linguistic usage while in the field on the abbreviation MAE, which is as I say the most neutral term that one could use for this type of working opportunity. So too, established usage would seem to favor this move insofar as it follows a previous linguistic convention. After unification, Work Provision Measures (*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme*) were used to combat high unemployment. They generally lasted 6 to 12 months and were in certain other respects similar to the MAEs. Since “*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme*” is such a ridiculously long word, everyone used the abbreviation ABM. The important difference, though, between ABMs and MAEs is that the ABM had a regular salary as opposed to an “additional compensation.” As we will see, this turned out to be a disastrous characteristic insofar as it made an easy target for public critique of the workfare program.

The Federal Employment Agency additionally uses the term Supplemental Job (*Zusatzjob*) when referring to these working opportunities, which is likewise based on *SGB II*, §16d. The Job Centers in Bremen use the term “In-Job,” short for “Integration Job.” Employees of the Berlin Job Centers that I spoke with used everything from the abbreviation “AGH-MAE” or “MAE” to “One-Euro-50-Job,” which highlights the fact that Berlin pays 1.50 Euro an hour in additional compensation. In short, the federal government didn’t name the working opportunities in a particularly practical way such that it became necessary for others to participate in their

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which administer the Working Opportunities. I have three versions: 2 September 2005, 27 July 2007, and July 2009.

naming. If nothing else, one had to choose between the Federal Employment Agency's two usable names, MAE or Supplemental Job.

When the Federal Employment Agency configured the compensation for the MAE as supplemental, the main goal was likely to involve more unemployed in working opportunities than ever before. The baseline of Unemployment Benefits II is calculated in relation to expected costs for rent and utilities to ensure that the state pays out an absolute minimum for each individual. By maintaining this baseline even during an MAE, the state guarantees that remuneration extends only just beyond an individualized minimum for subsistence. While this payment configuration might make sense for the efficient bureaucratic management of the unemployed, it posed a special challenge regarding its ideological justification. Curiously, it appears that the Federal Employment Agency not only misrecognized this challenge from the beginning, but actually contributed to the symbolic degradation of the MAE by calling attention to its cost-saving potential. Consider this article from the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, which quotes an unnamed source from the Federal Employment Agency:

According to the Federal Employment Agency, Activities with Additional Cost Compensation, as the One-Euro-Jobs are called officially, are the "simplest, least complicated, and most economical variation" among the possible publicly supported opportunities for activity. The job is to be "in the public interest" and should not replace regular work. The Federal Employment Agency assumes that the local authorities (*Kommunen*) will be very interested in this model, which was adapted from Social Assistance. The reason: a conventional Work Creation Measure (ABM) costs, according to the Federal Employment Agency, as much as "5 to 6" One-Euro-Jobs. (4 Aug. 2004)

It's not entirely clear what is meant here but the most likely explanation is that the cost of an ABM (typically 900-1300 Euros) is 5 to 6 times the supplemental cost of an MAE (180 Euros per month assuming 30 hours per week at 1.50 Euro per hour). But the comparison doesn't really make any sense, because both the costs of an ABM as well as the supplemental costs of an MAE

are generally funded federally, i.e. through the Federal Employment Agency. If anything, it is the MAE that would end up costing the local authority more insofar as the local authority continues to pay over 70% of the costs for housing and heat during an MAE as stipulated in *SGB II*, §46, section 6. So too, not all ABMs were full-time, so not all ABMs cost the same. Regardless of how this curious comparison came about, whether on the basis of a shoddy comparison by the Federal Employment Agency or a misleading explanation on the part of the journalist, this case exemplifies a larger point. There is little evidence that the Federal Employment Agency recognized the extent to which their efficient management of social state funds could work against them in an ideological battle.

The Association for German Language (*GfdS*) assembles each year a list of the 10 words or phrases that have particularly defined public debate or otherwise stood for important themes.

Here is a sampling of choices relevant to welfare reform:

2007	2. Herdprämie (Stove Premium) <sup>27</sup>	4. arm durch Arbeit (poor because of work)
2006	2. Generation Praktikum (Generation Internship)	5. Prekariat
2004	1. Hartz IV	4. gefühlte Armut (perceived poverty)
	7. Ein-Euro-Job (One-Euro-Job)	
2003	2. Agenda 2010	3. Reformstreit (reform conflict)
2002	5. Ich-AG	7. Job-Floater
1997	1. Reformstau (reform gridlock)	

There are three terms here, which the reformers themselves introduced: Ich-Ag, Job-Floater, and Agenda 2010. The Hartz Commission coined the first two. Ich-AG (something like Me Inc.) refers to a new legal entity, a corporation of one, which was supposed to support entrepreneurialism and decrease undocumented labor. The Institut für deutsche Literatur at

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<sup>27</sup> The “Stove Premium” was what critics dubbed the Child Care Subsidy (*Betreuungsgeld*), which was to be paid to parents who didn’t send their children to kindergarten but instead provided that care themselves at home. See “‘Herdprämie’ ist Unwort des Jahres,” *Spiegel Online*, 15 January 2008 and “Geplantes Betreuungsgeld: Herdprämie macht abhängig,” *Taz*, 28 September 2010. The term is back in the news as of April 2012 insofar as it is forcing a split (again) between Angela Merkel, who wants to put the legislation through in cooperation with the CSU, and a fraction of the CDU, who are opposed to that move. See “CDU kritisiert Betreuungsgeld: Eine Revolte bringt die CSU in Rage” and “Betreuungsgeld-Debatte in CDU: Und am Ende steht die Mehrheit,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 April 2012.

Goethe University in Frankfurt chose the term as the *taboo* word of the year (*Unwort des Jahres*) arguing that it degrades individuals to the linguistic level of the stock market. In 2006, Ich-AGs were integrated into a new form of subsidy called Establishment Grants (*Gründungszuschuss*) and hence no longer exist in their original name. Job-Floaters are subsidies offered to firms that employ the otherwise unemployed. And Agenda 2010 refers to the SPD's plan for (in their words) adapting the social state to new socio-economic conditions. None of these terms is suited to elevating anyone's feeling regarding his or her own social status, which is precisely what Gingrich's rhetoric accomplished. By creating a strong, moral division between "us" and "them," Gingrich raised up his supporters over a perceived other such that they would actually stand to feel better about themselves by virtue of hearing him talk. In general, though, the rhetoric of welfare reformers in Germany was essentially devoid of such force of effect. The rhetoric of their critics, on the other hand, is another story.

Beginning in 2004 with the discussion surrounding Hartz-IV, the above list of words documents the arrival of a handful of terms or phrases pertaining to the working poor: "*gefühlte Armut*" (perceived poverty), "*Ein-Euro-Job*" (One-Euro-Job), "*Prekariat*," and "*arm durch Arbeit*" (poor because of work). "Perceived poverty" first appears in the Lexis Nexis database in 2002. Two articles contain the phrase that year, and it doesn't appear again until 2004 (12 occurrences), the year it made a significant impact on public debate.<sup>28</sup> The term "*Prekariat*" combined the adjective "precarious" (*prekär*) with the noun "proletariat" and was likely introduced or made popular around 2000 by anti-globalization activists, particularly in France. Certain is that the term became very important in Germany in 2006 when the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung published a study titled *Gesellschaft im Reformprozess* (Society in the Process of

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<sup>28</sup> Clearly, Lexis Nexis did not document all occurrences of the term. My goal here is simply to correlate an expanded use of the term with the protest against Hartz-IV in 2004.

Reform) that explored the link between value preferences and political affiliation. The study indicated that roughly 8% of voters belonged to the “*abgehängte Prekariat*” (left-behind precariat), which is “characterized by social exclusion and experiences of social decline.”

“Society in the Process of Reform” unleashed a furious debate in the media in October 2006 as it introduced what appeared to be a very new social strata in Germany. Clearly, this debate spurred the phenomenon I am outlining here, namely the emerging public awareness of the working poor in Germany. What seems to have slowed that emergence was the wide spread belief that it simply didn’t exist—not in Germany at any rate. The so-called German model was commonly known as a particular configuration of industrial relations in the post-war years involving a highly skilled, well paid, and strongly unionized workforce (Streeck 1997). Germany was specifically known for not having a low-wage sector.

As Gerhard Bosch and Claudia Weinkopf explain in the introduction to *Arbeiten für wenig Geld (Working for Low Pay)*, it was first in the 1990s that low-wage work became a point of discussion in Germany. But at that point it was only discussed as a potential solution to the unemployment problem. The question being asked was “*should we lower wages on one end of the labor market to increase employment*” (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 15). “The question as to how large the low-wage sector in Germany already was and how it had developed without political intervention hardly played a role at that time” (16) But as Bosch and Weinkopf show, a low-wage sector in Germany had not only existed in the shadows of an industry-dominated labor market, but it grew significantly in size between 1995 and 2005. In other words, the low-wage sector became an important part of Germany’s labor market in the decade preceding Hartz-IV, but it only became a matter of public awareness in and through the discussions surrounding welfare reform.

A perfect discursive storm began to coalesce, then, between 2004 and 2006. The low-wage sector had established itself in the labor market. In terms of public discussion, it had really only been considered as a political solution to unemployment. And welfare reform rhetoric did nothing to prevent critics from arguing that the welfare state was being dismantled. In other words, there was an important moment when a fairly pervasive form of poverty could be connected to the labor market policies of the Red-Green Coalition. And what better explanation for the rise of the working poor than all of those One-Euro-Jobs.

### **III. Mass media and the Hartz reforms**

Given the weak rhetorical framework in which the welfare reforms were embedded, discussions in the mass media have been far more consequential in determining the general contours of welfare discourse in Germany—and how welfare is in fact enacted—than any of the economic, legal, or political considerations. This means that the Anthropology of Policy, especially as it has been developed by Cris Shore and Susan Wright (Shore 2011; Shore and Wright 1995, 1997, 2011; Wedel et al. 2005; Wright 2011), is not entirely adequate to the German situation. Particularly the earlier formulation of their approach to policy as a constitutive force in the structuring of society (1997) would fail to account for the way in which the critical discourses in Germany filled the gaps of the official discourse and thereby asserted a more or less missing ideological position. Their latest formulation of an Anthropology of Policy, though, is more promising. “Policies belong to—and are embedded within—particular social and cultural worlds or ‘domains of meaning.’ But they create as well as reflect those worlds. From our perspective, policies are not simply external, generalized or constraining forces, nor are they confined to texts. Rather, they are productive, performative and continually contested” (Shore and Wright 2011, 1). My work here underlines the importance of considering the larger cultural

framework of which policy is a part. The German case would force us, though, to add that policies are limited and incomplete in various ways such that we must also consider other discourses with their own histories, trajectories, and logics in order to understand the broader cultural framework.

Stories in the media tend either to focus on the experiences, character, or general situation of the unemployed *individual* or they are oriented towards a more general *system* in which individuals are caught.<sup>29</sup> Both narrative tendencies are well suited to explaining the otherwise inadequately understood low-wage sector as well as the inner workings and consequences of welfare reform. Eva Müller's documentary *Die Armutsindustrie (The Poverty Industry)* exemplifies the narrative orientation towards a systemic explanation. Das Erste<sup>30</sup> aired the program on 15 July 2009 and it has been available on Youtube ever since. Following how this story develops will reveal the primary claims and consequences of the system-oriented mode of storytelling.

“This story begins with a trampoline. A trampoline that was produced in China until a year ago.”<sup>31</sup> The CEO of this trampoline producing company (Bellicon) was dissatisfied with the high transportation costs and the low quality of labor associated with Chinese production. A solution would be to produce in Germany, were it not for higher wage costs. “[CEO:] I have to admit, we couldn't imagine that we would be able to produce at a reasonable cost in Germany, but we've actually succeeded at that.”

[Narrator:] And the production is here: Stuttgart-Feuerbach instead of China. The secret? The state pays almost all wage costs. One-Euro-Jobbers work here and there are activity subsidies (*Beschäftigungszuschüsse*)... A trampoline produced with public funds – how is that possible? The fundamental problem is that the Federal

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<sup>29</sup> These two different types of stories are typically written for and read by very different people.

<sup>30</sup> Das Erste is a publicly owned broadcaster whose history can be traced to the first television broadcast after WWII.

<sup>31</sup> I am responsible for the transcription and translation of all quotes from the film.

Employment Agency has no occupation (*Beschäftigung*) for millions of unemployed. Consequently, it commissions businesses, which hire the unemployed for the associated wage subsidies, offer [vocational] courses for them, and organize internships. A parallel world of work arises accordingly. This film tells how a business developed out of the lack of work (*Arbeit*) and asks: *just who profits from this?*

From the story of a trampoline, the documentary shifts to the story of Hans, who was for many years a professional driver before becoming unemployed. To make matters worse, he is basically illiterate. “The Federal Employment Agency did not have a job for him, but it did have an activity (*Beschäftigung*),” namely an internship in which he packed boxes. After completing the internship, he was not any more proficient at reading and writing than before, nor was he any closer to having a job.

How can it be that the tax payer pays for this work—above all when it does not improve the situation of those affected?<sup>32</sup> For the companies, it’s lucrative. The Cologne trampoline company even retrieved its production from China. In the distribution center of Phillip von Kunhardt, there are only yet a handful of persons securely employed. Production occurs in Stuttgart with unemployed Germans. [CEO:] So what we do here is assemble and ship the equipment. Nothing is produced here per se, just assembled. Which is, at the end of the day, very little. We subcontract much of course to Neue Arbeit.<sup>33</sup> [nervous laughter] [Narrator:] Neue Arbeit. It is no normal subcontracting firm. Neue Arbeit is a so-called activity-association (*Beschäftigungsgesellschaft*) and exists in order to prepare unemployed persons for the proper (*richtigen*) labor market. For every activated (*beschäftigten*) unemployed person, Neue Arbeit receives money from the state. This is possible because the new employer is recognized as serving the public good (*gemeinnützig*). Yet how does the production of a trampoline serve the public good and who exactly produces it? [Transition to the Neue Arbeit facility. The narrator interviews René, a trained metal smith, who lost his position at Porsche.] [René:] I work the same 8 and half hours, have to hustle and sweat just as at a rea—, a normal company. There is no difference. [Narrator:] Except that your job is subsidized by the state. [René:] Yeah.

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<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that this is in the plural. In other words, on the basis of the case of Hans, the documentary generalizes.

<sup>33</sup> Neue Arbeit is a nonprofit company (gGmbH) operating in and around Stuttgart and is affiliated with the evangelical church.

And so on and so forth. It's an interesting story. In terms of economic history, one might see here the return of industry to a post-industrial context in the form of a service. But that's not quite the story that the film tells. The story that the film tells is the return of industry to the first world as state-subsidized industry. How so? Interviews with the affected lead us to believe that *Neue Arbeit* does not exist to serve them insofar as their employment situation is no better for having participated in the educational services of *Neue Arbeit*. The film does not document anything that permits us to believe that a service is actually performed. Rather, it tells of the production of a trampoline that entails a fictive service component in order to legitimate the state subsidies necessary for its production.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the film does not investigate how an individual case went wrong, but how the system is flawed. The figures, so to speak, become symbolic of all like agents: businesses profit while the affected become trapped in a cycle of low wage, insecure work and this all because of the manner in which the state intervenes on the basis of Hartz-IV and its One-Euro-Jobs.

*Deutschlands glücklichster Arbeitsloser* (Germany's Happiest Unemployed Person) was a documentary that employed the alternative narrative orientation, that is towards the individual. RTL aired it in 2007 as the second episode of a doku-soap series *Deutschlands schrägste Typen* (Germany's most Ridiculous Dudes).<sup>35</sup> Arno's trial performance at four potential jobs—after having been unemployed for 27 years—served as the basis for the documentary. As is evident from the title of the episode, suspense was not exactly an important strategy for hooking viewers' attention.

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<sup>34</sup> Numerous aspects of the documentary strike me as misleading, but this is the most important one. The MAEs are all locally orchestrated and aim more or less at the local integration of long-term unemployed persons. Accordingly, one would be hard pressed to find an MAE in Berlin that is related to industrial production. The more common MAEs in Berlin are found squarely in the service sector.

<sup>35</sup> RTL is one of Germany's most popular commercial broadcasters.

More than the other daily newspapers in Germany, the *Bild* relies on a biographical focus in way that occasionally resembles “Germany’s Happiest Unemployed Person.” But it is a rather difficult paper to submit to anything resembling a scientific analysis given that it is not digitized and stored in databases. Not only does this make analyzing its articles materially burdensome, it also results in a larger margin of error as oversight of terms is more likely. Thomas Riedmiller, however, published a thorough and objective study of unemployment as a topic in the *Bild* in 1988, which is very much worth our attention.<sup>36</sup> I will summarize and discuss the portions of Riedmiller’s study that are relevant to my present purpose before turning to an analysis of the *taz*.

Riedmiller found a striking correspondence between the number of articles regarding unemployment and the total number of unemployed indicating that the *Bild* “accommodates the real situation” (10 and 71).<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, he also found a dominant, family-oriented ideological position to emerge as he compared the articles. Whereas German males (particularly at the ages of 22 and 42) were overrepresented in relation to unemployment statistics, women, the elderly, and non-Germans were underrepresented (13-30). The articles tended to express, and thereby advocate, the role of the German male as the provider for his family. Accordingly, unemployed women posed less of a problem as they could simply appropriate the role of caretaker within their family (25). When female unemployment was taken seriously as a problem, the woman’s work tended to be necessary because she was either single or divorced (27). Unemployment among the elderly appeared to be less tragic as they no longer had a necessary role in the small

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<sup>36</sup> Riedmiller’s study is based on his reading of articles pertaining to unemployment in the *Bild-Zeitung* and *Bild am Sonntag* from the years 1966-1967 and 1975-1983, which were periods directly following economic crises and higher rates of unemployment. All in all, he read 930 articles (1988, 9-10).

<sup>37</sup> Riedmiller consistently draws attention to the self-serving nature of this fact, insofar as it is in the *Bild*’s financial interests to engage the themes pertinent to its predominantly working class readers.

family (18). Non-Germans were regarded as something of a reserve army to be called into action only when demand for labor could not be met by natives (29).

In its concrete, biographical orientation, the *Bild* rarely portrayed the unemployed in a negative light (93), as “the narrating ‘I’ set the prevailing tone for the coverage” (35). One has to wonder, though, if this is still the case given the changing role of the small family in the post-industrial context. In other words, if the *Bild* previously played up the symbolic value of work insofar as it lent structure and stability to the traditional small family and the small family, in turn, functioned as the cornerstone of the social order, we might need to ask different questions of *Bild* coverage of unemployment today. At any rate, it seems plausible that the *Bild* coverage of unemployment in from the late 1960s through the 1970s provided important ideological support for welfare reforms passed during the Kohl administration, which were strongly oriented around the small family.<sup>38</sup>

While conducting field research, I saw little evidence that biographically oriented narratives had a made a significant impact on how workfare participants or those administering the workfare programs experienced and related to the workfare programs. In fact, the only time negative stereotypes of the unemployed came up was in an interview with a workfare participant. He said that the media portrayed the unemployed as lazy do-nothings. “But that’s not me,” he said. “I get up early, I keep a clean house. I don’t sit around all day and watch TV.” What was particularly interesting about that encounter was the way in which he was able to dismiss a stereotyped identity of unemployed persons as inactive. The systemically oriented narratives, though, proved difficult or impossible for anyone to dismiss entirely. And it was precisely their impact that often made it difficult for me to pursue this project ethnographically, because they

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<sup>38</sup> Jens Alber provides a rigorous and thorough summary of welfare reform during the Kohl era (2000).

lent the MAEs a decisive negative moral charge. Hence, the MAE became a shameful thing to offer or take part in—particularly when a tourist started asking questions.

A taz report titled “The Pressure Point (*Reizpunkt*) of the Reform” refers to the One-Euro-Jobs as a symbol for the Hartz-IV laws.<sup>39</sup> The point is key, if we are to understand what all is at stake when we discuss the MAEs and the Hartz reforms more generally. For, just as the title seems to suggest, Hartz-IV likewise became representative of the Hartz laws. In other words, a symbolic doubling occurred whereby the term “One-Euro-Job” was taken as the embodiment of Hartz-IV, which signaled most notoriously the changes involved in the previous three sets of legal transformation.

“Ein-Euro-Job” first appeared in the taz on 19 March 2002 in a brief article commenting on Frank-Thorsten Schira’s (CDU) claim that the Red-Green coalition had thrown away millions in overpayments for the medical needs of social service recipients.<sup>40</sup> The article agrees in sarcastic hyperbole that these people “already live high on the hog” with their “opulent mobile homes” and One-Euro-Jobs. Given that the MAEs are based on the fourth Law for Modern Services in the Labor Market, which took effect on 1 January 2005, we can assume that the article is referring to an early local experiment with workfare programs. The term is not mentioned again in *taz* until 31 July 2004 and occurs regularly thereafter. From its first mention in 2002 through 30 May 2009, the terms “Ein-Euro-job(s)” or “1-Euro-Job(s)” appear in 909 articles. For this study, I read the 500 most recent articles, which appeared between 1 June 2005 and 26 May 2009. Over 99% (498) of these 500 articles used “One-Euro-Job” as a primary sign for the MAE. In other words, formulations of this variety in which “One-Euro-Job” is taken as the most appropriate name for the working opportunities were ubiquitous:

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<sup>39</sup> Teresa Havlicek, “Der Reizpunkt der Reform,” *Tageszeitung*, 25 March 2009, 24.

<sup>40</sup> “Lokalkoloratur,” *Tageszeitung*, 19 March 2002, 24.

One-Euro-Jobs are called so because the persons who perform them continue to receive Unemployment Benefits II but are additionally paid a cost-compensation of one Euro per hour. In Bremen, the One-Euro-Jobs are also called In-Jobs, Integration-jobs, because —contrary to the rest of the republic—qualification is also part of these jobs.<sup>41</sup>

Technically, the only correct information here is that regarding the pay structure. The MAEs have a different name in Bremen because they were not intended to be federally mandated and defined. So too, qualification measures are a common component of MAEs in general, but whether they are or not as well as what they consist of depends more on the host organization and the needs of the individual than it does on the BA or any of the ARGE. The point at any rate is that when “One-Euro-Job” appears in an article, it generally does not stand in apposition to an official name. Names besides Supplemental Jobs (*Zusatzjobs*) and Injobs that appeared in the 500 articles were Cheap-jobs (*Billigjobs*), Cheap-work (*Billigarbeit*), Two-Euro-Jobs, and 1-Euro-Additional-Compensation-Variety.

Of the 500 articles, 132 were thematically oriented towards the MAEs. A majority of those articles portrayed a cynical view of one of three entities: the service organization providing the work opportunity [25%], the state (in terms of politicians or political parties) [16%], or the governmental agencies in charge of unemployment services (i.e. the BA or Job Centers) [9%].

An article titled “One-Euro-Disaster: Intensified Exploitation (*Ausbeutung*)” offers an example.

Now we have it in black and white: the engagement of One-Euro-Jobbers is a downright profitable enterprise. So profitable that the providers of Activity-Measures run themselves into the ground competing for a piece of the huge pie... More important than the money for many of the affected is that they gain career experience. Above all, however, it was the prospect of competent mentoring and skill enhancement that permitted hope of entering the first labor market. In Hamburg, there is no longer any money “left over” for that. Although the One-Euro-Jobbers quite obviously earn money—otherwise they would not be so coveted.

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<sup>41</sup> “Ein-Euro-Jobs,” *Tageszeitung*, 29 December 2005, Bremen Lokal, 17.

They are therefore exploited in the classic sense. In that the Hamburg Senate fans the fires of competition at the cost of the unemployed and absorbs the profits, the last fig leaf is taken from the One-Euro-Jobs: it's not about qualification but the embellishment of statistics—and about the economizing.<sup>42</sup>

This article invokes a number of the common narratives that are told in the *taz* regarding the MAEs: politicians cleanse statistics, service providers get rich. Important here is the point that both the Hamburg Senate and the organizations providing MAEs are said to pursue their own interests at the expense of the unemployed involved in the programs.

As regards the activity itself, there is generally one or more of five predicates associated with it in these articles. The activity resembles **forced labor** (*Zwangsarbeit*) insofar as the affected are trapped in a cycle where they have no options other than participating in an activity. This notion appeared 10 times explicitly and 18 times implicitly or in 21% of the articles on the MAEs (out of the 500 articles, 22 mentioned forced labor explicitly and 42 explicitly or in 13% of the articles). It perhaps need not be mentioned but the explicit association of the AGH-MAE with *Zwangsarbeit* lends it a particularly negative connotation insofar as it equates it with the policies of National Socialism.

The activity is also said to constitute **exploitation** (*Ausbeutung*) of the affected, insofar as a number of other parties profit from their activity, though they do not. This association appeared 4 times explicitly and 67 times implicitly in the articles on MAEs (54%) as well as 7 times explicitly and 80 times implicitly in the 500 articles mentioning EEJ (17%). The previously cited article “One-Euro-Disaster: Intensified Exploitation” serves as a paradigmatic example. The activity is criticized for offering a **low-wage**. In a sense, using the term “One-Euro-Job” in and of itself draws attention to this aspect of the activity. Nevertheless, a number of articles highlighted this notion beyond merely mentioning that term (45 or 34% of the articles on MAEs; 85 or 17%

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<sup>42</sup> Jan Kahlcke, “Ein-Euro-Desaster: Verschärfte Ausbeutung,” *Tageszeitung*, Nord Lokal, 8 September 2006, 21.

of the articles mentioning EEJ). Consider, for example, an article titled “Exploitation to the Extreme” (*Ausbeutung auf höchstem Niveau*). The lead-in indicates that unemployed sociologists, also later referred to as cheap laborers (*Billigarbeiter*), are researching for one Euro an hour at the University of Hamburg. Curiously, the article later explains: “They work 30 hours a week and receive 210 Euros a month for that in addition to the Hartz-IV-money.” By my calculations, that makes for a pay-rate of 1.75 Euros per hour.

Finally, the conditions of the EEJ are often criticized as **precarious** (*prekär*) (6 explicit and 23 implied references or 22%; 11 explicit and 86 implied or 19%). “It won’t get Cheaper” provides a clear example: “1-Euro-Jobs have established themselves yet they remain contested. More than two years after their introduction, nationwide there are more than 1.3 million of these precarious working relations (*Arbeitsverhältnisse*), of which 33,000 are in Berlin alone.”<sup>43</sup> Often this line of criticism is premised on a comparison with “normal” working conditions or non-temporary labor that is subject to social insurance contribution. The same holds for the other three dominant predicates.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the reformers of Germany’s welfare state along with their cadre of experts did not have nearly as much effect on shaping welfare discourse as the critics of the system did. I have analyzed the ideological weaknesses of the activation rhetoric and shown how they opened the possibility for others to determine the cultural framework in which everyone implicated in the welfare state must operate. The most interesting question that this leaves us with, though, is this: in what sense have the critics of the Hartz reforms established a more effective ideological justification for neoliberalism? Much of the critique of state involvement in the lives of persons on welfare seem to terminate with the point that “we” would

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Nowak, “Billiger geht’s nimmer,” *Tageszeitung*, Berlin Lokal, 1 March 2007, 22.

all be better off if the state removed itself as much as possible without totally ruining whatever current stability the system offers. Critics tell numerous stories about a system that forces the unemployed against their will to work in situations where everyone benefits from the work except them, the exploited. What's more, when these One-Euro-Jobbers do the work that they are forced to do, they worsen working conditions for the rest of us—who are apparently of our own volition active. Of the 132 articles thematically focused on One-Euro-Jobs that I read from the *taz*, 39 (29.5%) made this point, that the One-Euro-Jobs had a negative impact on the national labor market. Only 3 of these 132 articles portrayed the One-Euro-Jobs in a positive respect.

You may easily guess what important assistance taking the super-ego into account will give us in our understanding of the social behavior of mankind... It seems likely that what are known as materialistic views of history sin in underestimating this factor. They brush it aside with the remark that human “ideologies” are nothing other than the product and superstructure of their contemporary economic conditions. That is true, but very probably not the whole truth.

-Sigmund Freud, “The Dissection of the Psychological Personality”

### 3. Searching for Spirit in the German Workfare State

#### Introduction

“There are two large groups,” the rough-and-ready man said. He was about to explain his classification of Supplemental-jobbers and I was trying to decide which was the wilder: the man’s hair or the building in which we sat. The latter was a concrete monstrosity that had the look of a Gordon Matta-Clark piece, as if someone had sawn an entire wing off the rear of the building so that we might ponder the steel and concrete structure, which stood so resolutely through the turmoil of the twentieth century. Curiously enough, the interior boasted more graffiti than the crumbling exterior (it was of course bombs in the Second World War and not a rogue architect that had revealed the cross section). Perhaps most curious, though, was simply that this all still existed as it did where it did, namely as an artists’ squat in Berlin’s Scheunenviertel, otherwise currently known as a “Szeneviertel” or hip neighborhood on account of its numerous shops, restaurants, and bars.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Granted, this area just north of Old Berlin historically served to sequester undesirables (first fire hazards such as hay and straw—hence the name “Barn Quarter”—then also of course Jews). And prostitutes line Oranienburger Street each night. But the fact remains that this neighborhood has seen significant change, mostly gentrification, since the early 1990s.

“The one group is quite young and is getting pushed down,” the man with the wild hair continued. “We had, for example, Arno.<sup>45</sup> He completed something of a year-long internship here [technically the position was an MAE]. Highly, highly gifted young man. With good credentials. And he only wanted to become an event manager (*Veranstaltungskaufmann*). He had the stuff to do much more.”

The man with the wild hair implied that the Job Center was directly responsible for the way in which Arno had underestimated himself. And there is likely some truth to this claim that merits further consideration. Placement officers with the Job Centers, generally speaking, attempt to steer their customers towards feasible careers. In other words, placement officers never base their advice exclusively on the individual customer and his or her potential per se, but rather always begin with and return to established market needs and expectations as the primary basis for orienting their customers. The man with the wild hair takes the reverse approach. He has for quite some time worked towards establishing and maintaining a public space for artistic production and exhibition—by which he doesn’t mean a gallery where artists can display work so long as it has been recognized and accepted by this or that cultural or governmental authority. Rather, he is interested in opening up a space where artists can create and show work regardless of any and all prevailing market forces or dominant tastes. “As long as it proceeds within the parameters of the law, ultimately everything’s permitted here,” he said. The crux of this disagreement, then, is that he seeks to open the possibility for developing artistic potential despite or in the face of any and all external constraints or mandates. The archetypal placement officer, on the other hand, attempts to accommodate established external forms, conceived in terms of career trajectories for which there is some market demand such that an individual might be integrated into that social form.

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<sup>45</sup> Here as throughout, I have changed names and obscured identities.

The tension between subjective capacity and external form lies at the center of Dominic Boyer's ethnography of dialectical social knowledge in Germany as is evident from how he defines the main terms of his analysis: "If 'Spirit' (Geist) or a similar term tends to condense and to epitomize a sense of creative subjectivity in a maximally pure form, then a term like 'System' (or one of its metonyms or analogues) emerges as a master trope that condenses and epitomizes external form and mediation in its most total, organic, and abstract sense" (2005, 12) Although Boyer focuses primarily on the knowing subject and hence the epistemic framework in which, for example, complex processes of identification are worked out, the two primary terms here (spirit and system) can help us understand how recipients of Unemployment Benefits II might evaluate their own potential in relation to the labor market as each perceives it. I would like to complicate this conceptual framework, though, by reclaiming a fundamental split wholly on the side of the subject, which Max Weber articulated in his discussion of spirit in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

In the first section of this chapter, I will offer a close reading of Weber's distinction between traditional and spirited relations to labor and show how this difference corresponds to the ego / super-ego divide that Sigmund Freud outlined in his meta-psychological writings. I will argue that a spirited relation to labor, and hence a career, has more to do with stabilizing self-esteem than with earning a living. In the second section, I will take a close look at the legal framework and its mechanisms that were intended to activate the unemployed as well as the institutional pressures that push individuals in and out of this system. In short, I will argue that the workfare reforms tend towards reaffirming traditional, i.e. rational-strategic, relations to work, and only occasionally spirited ones. The significance of that point will emerge on the other end of my discussion of Weber.

When the Job Center called the man with the wild hair and asked if it would be possible to extend Arno's position by an additional year, he became infuriated and hollered: "Why don't you just shoot the 16-year-olds when they finish with school as long as no one needs them?" Arno's placement officer, apparently taken aback by this abrasiveness, ended up finding him an apprenticeship-training position (*Ausbildungsplatz*) as an event manager instead. The point of the story seemed to be this: young people have great potential but they very much need an advocate to push the Job Center to work on their behalf and not just shuffle them around in order to get rid of them for a few months at a time. This is an interesting and important point that came up repeatedly in my field work and I will return to it below, particularly in the third chapter.

"As concerns older folk, in our experience, right at about 35 there's already a trench. By then, they've already given up in part. They often have the feeling that they are no longer needed." With the trench metaphor, the man with the wild hair meant that these persons had more or less dug themselves in and won't move forward. It's an apt metaphor: the trench offers protection in a sense and also guarantees that they'll remain stationary. Many persons holding administrative positions in the new workfare-state, be it in Job Centers or in organizations that offer Supplemental Jobs, made a similar division among the participants. There were always two groups and the dividing-line always fell between *wanting to* and *not wanting to*. "Classic example of those that don't want to: the youth," a divisional manager at one of Berlin's Job Centers told me. The content of the two categories, then, was not always the same, but administrators tended to mention the distinction when explaining to me this or that aspect of the workfare programs. It is a division that a policy of conditional benefits brings to the fore—whether it simply forces those who "don't want to" into various forms of social interaction or whether it actually creates this reluctance by promising sanctions for non-compliance.

## I. Traditional and spirited relations to labor and their psychological basis

Weber clearly stated in one of his many footnotes what he intended to accomplish with *The Protestant Ethic*: “if anything, then this essay should make the following contribution: to expose the only apparently univocal concept of the ‘rational’ in its equivocality” (2004, 113). Nevertheless, many readers of Weber’s work overlook the way in which he developed a multifaceted conception of rationality and so haphazardly lump all of its various connotations together in a single, associative link. Consider, for example, a brief summary that Eli Zaretsky offers of Weber’s main point in *The Protestant Ethic*:

Weber argued that the Calvinist idea of a rationalized, methodical life-plan devoted to this-worldly affairs—a “calling” (*Beruf*)—was crucial in precipitating the spirit of capitalism. Originating in aspirations for salvation, Weber reasoned, rational, goal-directed, methodical self-organization remained integral to the emerging commercial and industrial order even after it lost its support in religious life. (2008, 366)

While methodically planning one’s life certainly evinces a form of “rationality,” following a calling does not necessarily imply *rational* in the sense of goal-directed behavior. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber consistently points to the fact that one does not accept a calling as a means of satisfying one’s wants or needs so much as an end-in-itself, and the two are not the same. My entire argument in this chapter rests on this point so we will have to consider the issue in far greater detail. Before proceeding, though, I would like to underline the fact that rationality according to Weber is rarely straightforward and often implies, as we will see, a certain amount of perspective.

On the one hand, Weber’s analysis of the spirit of capitalism is all the more forceful, both rhetorically and conceptually, for having been developed in relation to an opposing term. But he also argued the point as a matter of historical fact that “the position of... the practical behavior of

the average person in pre-capitalist eras” was not unhesitant acceptance of “free earning” so much as resigned tolerance (81). In fact,

Precisely this behavior was one of the strongest inner constraints for the adaption of humans to the prerequisites of an ordered bourgeois-capitalist economy. The antagonist, with which the ‘spirit’ of capitalism - in the sense of a specific, norm-bound lifestyle that arises in the guise of an ‘ethic’ - must first and foremost struggle, remains that type of sensibility and conduct, which one can designate as *traditionalism*. (82)

I would like to assure the reader that I do not intend here to reinvigorate any sort of opposition along the lines of tradition-stagnation versus modernity-progress. Such an opposition harks back to the Enlightenment, characterized as it was by a general skepticism towards religion and a naïve belief in a benevolent social order. Granted, Weber occasionally referred to the general cultural development (or backwardness) of a given national grouping of people and hence himself had an ambiguous relation to the question of progress. Nevertheless, I would also argue that we can use his work, particularly the opposition I’m focusing on here, to better understand how a certain relation to labor can be disadvantageous in a social system that tends “to socially restructure the population and to arrange them by career according to its needs” (Weber 2004, 65) and hence not the needs of the individuals.

The signature rationale of traditionalism (reduced of course to an ideal type) would appear to be to *work less rather than earn more*. Weber illustrated the point by referring to a situation common to agricultural production at the time. Once a crop had matured, there arose great potential for gain or loss depending on how efficiently it was harvested. In order to increase the intensity with which laborers worked, employers organized a piecework system, whereby wages depended not on total time worked but on total work completed. In such a system, a worker could hypothetically earn twice his standard daily wage if he could double the intensity with which he performed his normal tasks and hence double his output in a given timeframe.

According to Weber, this often resulted in precisely the opposite of what was intended, namely an increase in productivity.

[The laborer] didn't ask: how much can I earn in a day, but rather: how much do I have to work in order to earn the amount that I have up to this point earned and which covers my *traditional* needs?... The person does not want "by nature" to earn money and more money, but simply to live, to live as he is accustomed to living and to earn as much as is necessary for that. (83)

Everything here seems to revolve around the problem of maintaining an established standard of living. In other words, the work only has value *from this perspective* insofar as it provides earnings that in turn guarantee the standard of living. Accordingly, once that standard of living has been secured, there is no need for further toiling as it would provide no additional benefit. In short, then, this relation to labor is entirely *goal-oriented* in the sense that labor functions strictly as a means to provide a living, whatever that might entail.

In my fieldwork, I found significant evidence of this rational-strategic, goal-oriented relation to labor and earnings. My interviews with workfare participants were generally based on a series of open-ended questions, many of which were responses to what the interviewees were telling me. I did, though, ask all of my interviewees why they had agreed to work a Supplemental Job. Some of course offered multiple reasons for their participation, but the responses to this question were curiously uniform. Basically all of the adults<sup>46</sup> indicated that their primary reason for agreeing to participate in a workfare program was to earn additional income. An oft heard comment was "another 180 Euros means an awful lot to me." Additional income seemed all the more important to the persons I interviewed in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (deep in the former East Germany where Supplemental Jobs have far fewer negative connotations than in Berlin). I

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<sup>46</sup> I interviewed 24 workfare participants over the age of 25. As regards age, Germany's welfare system draws a sharp line between those under-25 and those that are older.

also spoke with over 50 youth (under 25 years of age), who responded quite differently though no less unanimously. They had accepted the position because they wanted to avoid having their basic benefits revoked.

The split in adult and youth explanations as to why they accepted a Supplemental Job recalls the division that I discussed at the outset of this chapter. The evidence would seem to underline what an administrator at a youth center told me, who had significant experience running MAE projects with both young and old participants. At the time I spoke with her, she was running a project with persons 55 years of age and older. “The youth are the worst,” she said. “*They just don’t want to.*” When we consider the two sets of responses I collected, though, in relation to each other, the most plausible explanation of the evidence is that participation in an MAE generally serves the goal of achieving or maintaining an accustomed lifestyle. The adults all had an employment history and many discussed their experience of unemployment as a multidimensional loss that could be reduced to issues with their new standard of living. “That was a tremendous shock for me, when I had to get used to living from Hartz-IV,” one participant told me. Only a select few of the adolescents I spoke with, on the other hand, had any work experience at all. It would appear, then, that they have become accustomed to the lifestyle one can afford on the basis of Unemployment Benefits II. When they accepted a Supplemental Job, they were guaranteeing that they wouldn’t lose even that standard of living. All in all, then, the participants approached the supplemental job in a rational-strategic manner: it was a means to achieve or maintain a particular lifestyle. Just so we’re clear, my argument is not that this relation to work emanates in quasi-natural fashion from these persons. In the previous chapter, I argued that the critical reception of workfare programs in the media solidified these relations by undermining the symbolic value of the MAEs. In the second section of this chapter, I will discuss

how the legal framework and institutional structures that stabilize the workfare state likewise reinforce a strategic relationship to work.

Weber's concept of spirit implies a very different relation to one's work and earnings than the goal-directed activity I have been discussing. Here too, his argument proceeds historically. According to Weber, the protestant doctrine of grace played a pivotal role in facilitating and bringing to completion the "demystification of the world" (146). If one was saved by grace alone, the sacraments, for example, could offer little help in effecting or reaffirming one's salvation. "For the sacraments are commanded by God for the increase of his glory... but are no means to achieve God's grace..." (145). For my purposes here, I would like to highlight two important consequences that this doctrine had. On the one hand, it imparted "a feeling of a shocking inward isolation of each individual" (145). On the other hand, it left adherents without any external signs "by which one could recognize one's belonging to the 'elect'" (150). Salvation, in other words, entirely became a matter of interiority. Curiously, though, it was also only something that God could grant. In other words, it was a matter that was at once intensely personal and also "external." For adherents to the doctrine of grace, *salvation could only be granted and reaffirmed by the Other within*, so to speak, and a vocation served as a quasi-abstract symbol reaffirming one's status as saved.

The fact that salvation according to the doctrine of grace could not be produced, earned, or secured essentially rendered goal-directed behavior useless as concerned the status of one's soul. Occasionally, Weber appears to say otherwise. "In order to *achieve* that certitude [of one's salvation], vocational work was urged as the preeminent means" (151). In other words, reformation leaders encouraged a particular form of labor, not for what it achieved, though, but for what it helped one dispel: "anxiety regarding one's soul" (153). Vocational work thus

became in this constellation recommended for helping stabilize one's self-feeling, particularly in regard to the ideal of belonging to the saved, just as it in certain respects became divorced from immanently conscious, intentional activity. This is what Weber means when he discusses the vocation as a goal in itself: the work is so valued precisely to the extent that it doesn't realize a conscious intention—at least not in any straightforward manner. For, as soon as one intentionally works towards salvation, one only proves the reverse, that one isn't saved. So too, the distancing of labor from its immediate, task-oriented goal is what permits and encourages a greater work intensity, as there is no longer any sort of concrete end point to one's labor. The end result, at any rate, is this: "man is dependent on earning as the purpose of his life; whereas earning is no longer dependent on man as a means to the end of satisfying his material needs of existence" (78). Here, Weber brings the opposition between traditionalism and spirited labor to a single, clear point. Elsewhere, it's worth noting, he remarked that from the standpoint of happiness, it is actually irrational that "man exists for his enterprise and not the reverse" (91).

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello argue that spirit is fundamentally a matter of ideology: "we call the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism 'spirit of capitalism'" (2005, 8). Certain representations of the social, then, and their justifications are said to provide the motivational wellspring of capitalist society.

If, contrary to prognoses regularly heralding its collapse, capitalism has not only survived, but ceaselessly extended its empire, it is because it could rely on a number of shared representations—capable of guiding action—and justifications, which present it as an acceptable and even desirable order of things: the only possible order, or the best of all possible orders. (10)

If they are right, then the difference between Weber's oppositional pair of spirited labor and traditionalism must be reducible to a difference in ideology—spirit being based on one ideological constellation, traditionalism on another. In other words, Boltanski and Chiapello's

analysis can only explain the difference between Weber's notions of traditionalism and spirit as a difference in ideology or schema by which one represents—above all—the benefits of their participation in the system. I would argue, though, that this is not a matter of differing ideologies so much as differing positionalities—a term, which I will tentatively define as *the manner in which one's relation to the social is structured*. Thus a person's positionality in the social field is different than one's position in the social field. The fundamental issue, at least as far as my reading of Weber is concerned, is not whether the person has this or that class affiliation, which might be linked to this or that ideology on the basis of this or that interest. The important point is that in a spirited relation to work one loses the rational-strategic stance towards work itself and labor becomes a matter of sheer obligation bereft of tangible meaning. Traditionalism just as spirit can be reduced to the particular manner in which one's position vis-à-vis labor (and thus also vis-à-vis the other social actors with which one relates on the basis of labor) is structured. Traditionalism implies a strictly strategic positionality towards labor whereas as spirit implies a predominantly obligatory positionality towards labor, in which one is obligated to take on a vocation so as to maintain one's confidence in having been saved and hence also one's self-respect.

In the Freudian scheme, strategic and obligatory behaviors are both bound to specific components of the psyche, namely the ego and the super-ego respectively. It is in fact surprising how neatly Weber's analysis of the protestant ethic corresponds to Freud's analysis of psychical structure.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, Freud says that it is the ego that “finally learns to change the external world in goal-directed fashion to its advantage” (2009, 42). It is particularly regarding Weber's notion of spirit, though, that Freud's meta-psychological writings are of value; they

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<sup>47</sup> Incidentally, less than a decade separated Weber's 1904-1906 study and Freud's first essay in which he discussed the super-ego (“On Narcissism: An Introduction,” 1914).

offer a full explanation of the psychological configuration that must lie at the root of the protestant work ethic. According to Freud, the primary activity of the super-ego rests in the “restriction of satisfactions” (2009, 44). In this regard, the existence of the super-ego helps explain how and why an ascetic lifestyle could become not only possible but also, in a sense, pleasurable. For, it can in fact be pleasing to satisfy the demands of an outspoken super-ego, which requires the refusal of this or that concrete, sensual pleasure, a process Freud termed sublimation. Freud explains the emergence and development of the super-ego as a result of the oedipal complex whereby a child renounces its attachment to the mother and, “in the simplified case of the male child,” forms a two-sided identification with the father, which entails both an ideal and a prohibition (2007, 270-273).<sup>48</sup>

I bring up the classical Freudian explanation of the super-ego and Weber’s reference to asceticism in order to make a case for how easily and tightly we can bring these theories into relation with one another. But I would also like to take this opportunity to discuss briefly what I don’t want to do on the basis of this theoretical entanglement. It would be offensive and absurd—for too many reasons to list—to speculate on the individual psychology of any of my informants. What did or didn’t occur as they proceeded through the oedipal complex is really of no interest to us here. As concerns the question of asceticism, the interesting question is not exactly whether or not my informants’ individual psychological constitutions are conducive to an ascetic lifestyle. The basic question of this investigation is, rather, what are the possible consequences of the specificities of the general socio-cultural configuration surrounding workfare in Germany for the many people caught up in the system. In short, my argument is that

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<sup>48</sup> Carl Müller-Braunschweig argued similarly that the super-ego arose first through the process of toilet training whereby the child had to give up a pleasure that it had actually enjoyed unlike the pleasure to be given up in the oedipal complex. See Müller-Braunschweig (1921).

nearly everything about this configuration is conducive to the strategic positionality that Weber typified in his notion of traditionalism.

The line of thought from the Freudian scheme that is of particular importance for my argument here begins with his observation in “On Narcissism: An Introduction” that repression proceeds “from the self-regard (*Selbstachtung*) of the ego” (2007, 69). Seven years earlier in his essay “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness,” Freud had argued that society’s overly prudish mores were the primary cause of neurosis. “A strict upbringing, which permits no exercise of the so early awoken sex-life, makes available the repressing power ...” (2004, 130). The important difference is that Freud, in the later essay, made the advancement that repression doesn’t just follow from free-floating prohibitions, but that social norms actually become cathected and internalized. In other words, individuals become deeply invested in an ideal of themselves and it is at behest of this ideal-ego, so to speak, that certain impulses or pleasures would have to be given up in order to maintain the highly esteemed ideal or self-respect. The connection that emerges here between the super-ego and self-regard, namely that they are in end effect one and the same, will be a guiding motif of all that follows.

Jeanne Lampl-De Groot made significant contributions to our understanding of the origin and development of the super-ego in all of its guises. Her work is particularly worth discussing in this context for two reasons. First, she explored the origin of the super-ego in terrain far beyond the oedipal complex, which will help us clarify the connection between the super-ego and self-respect. Second, she drives an ambiguity, which Freud left insufficiently explained in his work, to an exploding point.

In an early consideration, Lampl-De Groot remained fairly close to the Freudian formulations concerning the ego-ideal discussed above: “the ego ideal plays an important role in

maintaining the narcissistic position of the ego organization... When the self-respect is wounded the child satisfies his narcissistic needs in creating and introjecting his ideal” (1985, 87). Some difficult questions arise already here. Isn’t self-respect premised on having already internalized an ideal? And if so, is what the child creating different? If it’s different, could it eventually be the same or function in like fashion? In “Ego Ideal and Superego,” Lampl-De Groot takes her theory a step further and raises the ego ideal’s compensatory function to the point that it becomes its defining feature. “The ego ideal is originally and essentially a *need satisfying agency*, whereas the superego (or conscience) is originally and essentially a *restricting and prohibiting agency*” (1985, 228). By this point she has worked out a four-stage developmental process for both the ego ideal and the superego and it’s worth considering more closely how she characterized the development of the ego ideal.

There are always situations when the child feels disappointed, frustrated, and above all *powerless* because he is unable to bring about a change in this painful state of unpleasure. To deal with this condition, so dangerous for his self-esteem (his narcissistic equilibrium), the child develops alongside the primitive hallucinatory wish fulfillments his comforting fantasies of grandeur and omnipotence. (227)

In Lampl-De Groot’s developmental scheme, each step from hallucinatory wish fulfillment to “the formation of ethics and ideals as attainable goals” (228-229) is propelled by a disappointment and its resulting feeling of powerlessness. This will become clearer in just a moment, but as the self-regard is challenged, new ideals are sought to compensate.

A significant ambiguity in Freud’s work on this theme, which first came to light in his essay “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” haunts much of Lampl-De Groot’s work as well. The problem is how to define and differentiate the ego-ideal, the ideal ego, and the super-ego. Jacques Lacan offered the solution in his seminar from 1953-1954 when he focused attention on the important difference between the ego-ideal and the ideal ego, which is absent in the work of

Lampl-De Groot and many others. And here's the important difference: "one is on the plane of the imaginary, and the other is on the plane of the symbolic—since the demand of the *Ichideal* [ego-ideal] takes up its place within the totality of demands of the law" (1991, 134). What Lampl-De Groot discusses as the "ego ideal" throughout her work, then, is better understood as two different things operating on two different planes. The ideal ego is very much a form that is created to satisfy certain demands relating to a negative self-feeling. Accordingly, it could be argued that there is a link between hallucinatory wish fulfillment and the final stage of ideal production, insofar as they are both responses to a damaged ego-ideal or self-respect and the negative feelings that accompany such a state. The ideal ego, therefore, is a form that exists to satisfy the demands of the ego-ideal, operating on the plane of the symbolic.

Before closing, I'll summarize and straighten out what has been said regarding the structure and functioning of the Freudian psyche. According to Lampl-De Groot's developmental theory of ideal formation, feelings of powerlessness can pose challenges to one's self-regard. In order to stabilize how one feels regarding oneself, ideals are sought on an imaginary plane. As one ages, these ideals become more realistic in the sense that one could live up to them (even if they never the less remain on the imaginary plane according to Lacan). At some point, it appears that the subject becomes positioned towards one of these "ideals" (or perhaps precursors to ideals) in a fundamentally different way. What for Freud always remained "externally imposed" (2007, 75) becomes an integral part of who one is. It raises one's estimation of oneself but it also exerts new demands on the ego (a point that Lampl-De Groot's work does not engage). The ego must from now on achieve what the ego-ideal requires it to achieve. This, in turn, can further give rise to ideal egos and the behavior that is patterned on them.

In a more Lacanian register, the ego-ideal functions as an Other within oneself insofar as it belongs to one's basic structuration but also, for the most part, remains outside of one's immediate control. For, it signals whether or not one is living up to standard (and never vice-versa). What one internalizes in this way, though, is not just various representations of what is good or just. In other words, this situation cannot be reduced to an individual's appropriation of an ideological schema. Rather, at the most fundamental level, *what one internalizes is the desire of the other*. In *The Lacanian Subject*, Bruce Fink provides extensive commentary on Lacan's dictum "Le désir d'homme, c'est le désir de l'Autre" (the desire of man, that's the desire of the other) along with its multiple meanings (1995, 54 and 59). Of singular importance for us here is the point that one of the greatest wellsprings of desire and hence motivation is what one takes the other to be missing or desiring from oneself. That is, we are compelled to fulfill the desire of the other as a way of maintaining our own self-regard.

As concerns the MAEs, when they go well, it is often a matter of them raising one's self-regard. Consider how a placement officer described situations in which MAEs achieve something.

Let me put it like this: maybe I have someone who is very simply structured, for whom it's very difficult to go on the offensive on their own, to apply for jobs—sometimes you have to have the honesty to say—persons who have been unemployed for a long period and who experienced the first period of unemployment as an entirely frustrating phase in which no one wanted them, where the economic situation—especially east Germany is like this—is such that it's very very difficult to find a job. If you're not highly qualified or a skilled laborer—they have it easier—but people who even don't have good qualifications, sometimes they give up. When you have such a person in an MAE—I've actually seen this happen: some of them really blossom when they finally receive an acknowledgment after so many years that someone does in fact have an interest in their labor (*Arbeitskraft*).

Again, what's interesting here is that the placement officer doesn't describe a situation in which an MAE reestablishes fading skills or develops lacking skills but rather reconfirms one's self-regard in a way that might lead to a re-invigorated job search.

## **II. The post-Hartz welfare state and the question of discipline**

Stephan Lessenich argues in his recent book *The Reinvention of the Social* that “the society of the present promotes itself as an ‘active society’ and ‘its’ welfare state breathes the spirit of ‘activation’” (2008, 16). He's certainly onto something. Reforming the laws that regulate welfare sanctions and introducing a new workfare program for long-term unemployed persons, to name just a few important changes, transformed the German welfare state quite radically. And the point was certainly to activate and integrate everyone that came into contact with the newly formed Job Centers. Lessenich's study, though, seems to overestimate the power and effect of the discourse surrounding the legal and institutional transformations that constituted welfare reform. I confronted the question of discourse more directly in the previous chapter. Here we concern ourselves with the concrete institutionalization of strategies aimed at activating and integrating unemployed persons in general, but the long-term unemployed in particular.

### **a. The legal framework**

The legal reforms leading up to and including the four “Modern Laws for Services on the Labor Market” (Hartz I-IV) touched on a number of disparate issues such that it wouldn't be of much help or interest to list them all or attempt a summary of them. I will, however, offer a brief overview of relevant currents. The *Social Law Book III (SGB III)* came into effect on 1 January 1998 and began to emphasize the responsibility of individuals in helping to avoid and shorten unemployment. *SGB III* also began to decentralize labor market intervention. The Job-AQTIV Law came into effect on 1 January 2002. Most importantly for our purposes, it introduced the

Integration Agreement (*Eingliederungsvereinbarung*), which I will discuss in detail below. It made available a number of subsidies to encourage vocational training and employment among groups that tend to be more difficult to employ, such as older folk and younger folk. And it made it possible to outsource job placement services to private service providers.<sup>49</sup> Hartz I and II came into effect on 1 January 2003, Hartz III on 1 January 2004. The Hartz laws of course implemented many of the recommendations of the Hartz Commission, which aimed at reducing undocumented labor, adding flexibility to the labor market, and transforming bureaucratic institutions into smooth operating employment agencies. Thus, for example, the Federal Employment Office (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*) became the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*).<sup>50</sup> That brings us to Hartz IV, which is where the overview ends and a more nuanced analysis must proceed.

One of the most contentious aspects of Hartz IV was that it was said to combine Unemployment Assistance (*Arbeitslosenhilfe*) and Social Assistance (*Sozialhilfe*). Supporters hailed this as a landmark improvement; critics claimed that it constituted welfare retrenchment (*Abbau des Sozialstaats*). As an outsider to the system, I found this all a bit baffling. Consider this schematic overview of the primary unemployment/welfare services available before and after Hartz IV.

Prior to Hartz IV:

Unemployment Benefits ( <i>Arbeitslosengeld</i> )	premium-based financing, federally operated	60 or 67% of the previous salary <sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps less important for us is the fact that it made subsidies available for projects benefiting the environment and infrastructure, such as urban renewal projects. In other words, there was also a socially responsible side to some of this legislation that otherwise obviously embodies the logic of neoliberalism.

<sup>50</sup> I am following the Bundesagentur für Arbeit here in how it translates its name into English.

<sup>51</sup> The rate depends on whether there are children in the household. Rates have been at this level since 1994.

Unemployment Assistance ( <i>Arbeitslosenhilfe</i> )	tax-based financing, federally operated	50 or 57% of the previous salary <sup>52</sup>
Social Assistance ( <i>Sozialhilfe</i> )	tax-based financing, locally operated	minimum for existence <sup>53</sup>

After Hartz IV:

Unemployment Benefits I ( <i>Arbeitslosengeld I</i> )	premium-based financing, federally operated	60 or 67% of the previous salary
Unemployment Benefits II ( <i>Arbeitslosengeld II</i> )	tax-based financing, federal/local cooperation	minimum for existence
Social Assistance ( <i>Sozialhilfe</i> )	tax-based financing, locally operated	minimum for existence

Hartz IV made no significant changes to the unemployment benefits based on insurance premiums. Social Assistance continued to be financed and administered through the local political authority, though its benefits were streamlined. Whereas there used to be a number of one-time payments for various incidental costs, Hartz IV reduced this all to a single monthly basic payment.<sup>54</sup>

Hartz IV did, however, fundamentally restructure the middle benefit system. Eligibility as well as payment level had depended on one's previous work history. Hartz IV reversed that

<sup>52</sup> Prior to 1994 the benefits were allotted in one-year increments and could be renewed indefinitely. As of 1994, there was a two year limit at which point one would receive Social Assistance if there was still need.

<sup>53</sup> The minimum for existence, both before and after Hartz IV, was calculated in relation to the consumption patterns of households whose earnings were in the lowest 20%.

<sup>54</sup> The switch to a basic payment was often met with the criticism that it was an inconspicuous way to lower Social Assistance payments. And there is certainly some truth to that. See, for example, Marie-Luise Hauch-Fleck, "Wie aus mehr weniger wird," *Zeit Online* 16 Dec. 2004. But it's also more complicated than generally acknowledged, because it all depends on individual situations and whether or not, for example, the individual always applied for every benefit that he or she had qualified for. Francis Fox Piven has long criticized welfare distribution in the U.S.A. precisely because recipients rarely apply for all of the benefits that they are entitled to receive. See Piven and Cloward (2011).

orientation towards the immediate labor market in two important ways. First, it defined eligibility in terms of *earning capability* (as opposed to earning record). In other words, for persons not eligible for the premium-based unemployment benefits, the factor that would determine whether or not one would receive Unemployment Benefits II or Social Assistance is whether or not the person could still be expected to work. This, then, is what the reformers try to draw attention to when they refer to a combination of Unemployment and Social Assistance: thousands and thousands of people who had either been unemployed too long to receive Unemployment Assistance or who had never worked before were now set to receive Unemployment Benefits II and hence also the job-placement services of the Federal Employment Agency. Second, Hartz IV based the basic payment levels of Unemployment Benefits II on the existence-minimum (as opposed to one's previous earnings).

I asked a placement officer at a Job Center what she would change about the new social state if she could change anything. She immediately challenged the definition of “earning capable” (*erwerbsfähig*) which is set forth in *SGB II*, § 8: “a person is earning capable if he or she is not unable because of illness or handicap under normal conditions of the labor market to be gainfully employed for at least 3 hours daily.”

I would be for resituating the boundaries of support between the Social Services Office (*Sozialamt*) and the Job Center. This entrance requirement—when am I earning capable—it's set so low that you're supposed to place people, where you're really the opinion: for crying out loud! That's not someone who doesn't want to; *he really can't*. And then the pension paying institution says: yeah, but for three hours a day he can walk, stand, sit in rotation and he is not allowed to move his right hand all too much. We get doctor's reports like that. For me they are nominal members. I have these people here, I have to try to motivate them somehow. If I'm lucky, one will fit into a One-Euro-50 Job. But I'll be honest, it would be really good if someone would create another possibility here. What sits here at our desk as ostensibly placeable—if you would see an actual case, you would say: *are they crazy?* What the hell. We have so many people where the pension distributor says: nope,

not me, would cost money. The pension distributors aren't showered with funds [as we are]. Of course. They have a very different client in house than we do currently. I would without a doubt change that. That there are really people here who can work and not just people who are approved as earning capable from the bureaucratic or medical side or wherever.

The frustrations of this placement officer, charged as she is with the task of integrating even those who have been out of work for as long as Germany has been united,<sup>55</sup> are a strong indication that, as Lessenich rightly argues, “instead of drawing back, the state has changed the logic and form of its intervention” (2008, 14). Welfare state retrenchment is, in other words, an ill-suited concept for describing the effects of the Hartz reforms.

The logic behind redefining the eligibility criteria for the middle category of social services is fairly clear. The point was to bring the long-term unemployed as well as the never-before employed into contact with the placement services of the Federal Employment Agency. The reorganization of benefits around an existence minimum was, on the one hand, a necessary correlate of changing the eligibility criteria. Obviously, benefits could not be premised on previous wages if not all recipients had prior work experience. On the other hand, many have pointed out that basing Unemployment Benefits II on the existence minimum creates more of an incentive for recipients to accept employment in the regular labor market. As it turns out, this is not a straightforward proposition. The Institute for Employment Research (IAB) conducted a study late in 2005 in which they compared simulations of incomes from the pre-Hartz Unemployment Assistance with post-Hartz Unemployment Benefits II.<sup>56</sup> Roughly 17% of

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<sup>55</sup> This is not an exaggeration.

<sup>56</sup> There are a couple of points to bear in mind here. First, the IAB is the official research institute of the Federal Employment Agency. One would assume, then, that the IAB would constitute something of a propaganda machine, turning out studies that clearly supported BA policies. The title of the study in question here, “Losers, but also winners,” suggests that this is not exactly the case. I have, though, become convinced that the Federal Employment Agency is not altogether aware of the importance of rhetoric when communicating with the wider public (see the

Unemployment Assistance recipients would not receive any benefits under Unemployment Benefits II because either the income of a partner or the value of their current assets disqualified them (2). Roughly 55% to 60% of persons between the ages of 40 to 62 were estimated to receive roughly 20% less income from Unemployment Benefits II than they had received prior to Hartz IV (5 and 6). On the other hand, nearly 70% of persons between the ages of 18 and 25 were estimated to receive roughly 11% more income (5 and 6). In more concrete terms, persons who had a higher relative income at one point and, therefore, who had received higher relative Unemployment Assistance payments, stood to lose the most in the switch to a benefit system oriented towards a minimum for existence. Likewise, persons with lower relative incomes from earlier employment, i.e. young people, stood to gain from the transition. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that the Hartz reforms did not target single mothers as much of the American welfare reform seemed to. The income of 62% of single parents who had previously received Unemployment Assistance was estimated to improve (IAB 2005, 5).

The empirical findings of the IAB study may help explain the common classification that placement officers and administrators of MAEs repeatedly made regarding persons who either “do or don’t want to.” People with the most successful work histories, i.e. older folk, lost the most in the transition to Unemployment Benefits II. Strictly in rational-strategic terms, they would have been farthest from their accustomed standard of living and hence would, at the very least, have been willing to regain what they lost. If anyone experienced this transition as an improvement in their standard of living, it would have been those with the lowest previous income, i.e. youth. My point here of course is not to say that Unemployment Benefits II should be lowered so as to create even more incentive to take on employment. Virtually everyone I

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previous chapter). The other point to keep in mind here is that this study deals with simulations of incomes based on a random sampling of income and consumption conducted in 2003. See IAB (2005).

came into contact with in the field who had any concrete knowledge of what one can afford with Unemployment Benefits II was clear on this point: lowering the level of benefits at all would be destructive, plain and simple. One recipient told me that she found it “hard to believe that any person living from Hartz IV didn’t sustain some physical deterioration” for lack of necessary resources. Her own body, delicate and thin, seemed to bear out her hypothesis. And my point here is simply to point out what kind of motivation Hartz IV could have possibly created as well as to point out where the limits of that motivation might lie.

Aside from redefining the eligibility for and the calculation of tax-based unemployment benefits, Hartz IV underscored the conditional nature of these benefits. *SGB II* legally obligates recipients of Unemployment Benefits II to the pursuit of labor as is indicated in §1: “earning-capable, help-requiring persons must actively participate in all measures to integrate themselves into employment, in particular they must complete an Integration Agreement (*Eingliederungsvereinbarung*).” The conditionality of Unemployment Benefits II generally in fact depends on and is rooted in the Integration Agreement, which, on the one hand, implies two willful participants and hence an apparent lack of force. But it could also be argued that the agreement amounts to a disciplinary mechanism. For, the Integration Agreement structures the time of unemployment according to a more or less abstract time frame by requiring the customer, for example, to complete 10 applications for employment each month (and offer evidence that this was accomplished). On the basis of these criteria, the customer can be placed under surveillance insofar as it becomes possible to document and judge his or her progress (or lack thereof). Accordingly, the Integration Agreement might be considered as an analogue to the panopticon as Foucault discussed it, i.e. as a technology that limits resistance (insofar as one’s

livelihood depends on compliance) and aims to maximize one's usefulness for the labor market.<sup>57</sup>

It is certainly possible to consider the Integration Agreement as a disciplinary mechanism, but it cannot be reduced to that. I asked a Job Center employee what kinds of conversations were had with a customer prior to beginning an MAE.

We establish which actions are called for (*Handlungsbedarfe*) and what the strategies for action (*Handlungsstrategien*) will be: why should what be done now and what's the next goal. That's the point of the Integration Agreement. In principle, it's a goal-agreement. We record what the customer is supposed to do until our next meeting and what I'm supposed to take care of. That we agree and say: ok, currently I see you there and there, and it's important that we organize that and you do this for it and I do that for it and we'll see each other in 6 weeks. Then we'll see where we stand. It's about guaranteeing a tactical procedure for integration.

This placement officer clearly views the agreement as a cooperative enterprise. On the other side of Berlin, another placement officer described this sort of cooperation with customers to be the most satisfying part of her job.

The best thing ever, I have to say, is when I have a customer in my office, and I determine together with the customer that he has this and that educational need. And then he really pursues further training for, say, 5 or 6 months. And then—with his new certificate—he finds a job. That's really cool. That's when I think: *WOW! You've really accomplished something here.*

As I say, the Integration Agreement can certainly be used as a disciplinary mechanism. In general, though, it appears simply to ensure that the process moves efficiently towards the goal of integration into self-sustaining labor.

Sanctions were actually part of the German welfare state prior to Hartz IV. As the Hartz Commission reported, though, they were rarely used. In the mid 1990s, only 1.1% of

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<sup>57</sup> See Michel Foucault (1995, especially 221).

unemployed persons experienced sanctions on account of their severity (Hartz Kommission 2002, 98). Given that a sanction implied complete loss of benefits for 12 weeks, placement officers were reluctant to use them. The Hartz committee, for this reason, recommended “making the sanctions more flexible” so that placement officers would be more willing to use them as a tool of activation (Hartz Kommission 2002, 98-99). Accordingly, customers face sanctions if, without “important reason,” they refuse to complete any of the outlined duties in the Integration Agreement, refuse to sign an Integration Agreement, refuse to accept a “reasonable” (*zumutbar*) job, working opportunity, or vocational training, or if they break off a Supplemental Job before its assigned end date.<sup>58</sup> The first offence results in a 30% decrease in the basic benefits (*Regelleistung*) (i.e. not the money for housing and heat), the second in a 60% decrease. Three strikes and you’re out. If one fails to appear to a meeting with a doctor, psychologist, or case worker, one’s basic benefits are reduced by 10% with each infraction. Sanctions last three months (or as little as 6 weeks for youth between the ages of 15 and 25) during which time non-cash benefits can be made available under certain circumstances, though they don’t have to be.

**b. The institutional pressures**

When the middle category of the German welfare state was transformed to include earning-capable persons, many of the employees of the Social Service Offices were transferred to the newly formed Job Centers. “There wasn’t a consolidation phase after the reforms that would have allowed everyone to catch their breath,” a division manager told me. “Our coworkers felt quite pressed.” A placement officer with an extensive work history in the Social Services Office explained the transition to me as follows:

Yeah, suddenly, I was thrown together with coworkers from the Employment Agency, in a federal building [laughs], and—yeah, it was

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<sup>58</sup> See *SGB II*, §31, which is of course slightly more complicated than my rephrasing of it here. The criteria for what counts as a “reasonable” (*zumutbar*) job were significantly loosened with Hartz IV. See *SGB II*, §10.

pretty funny at the beginning because there were coworkers coming from two totally different working structures. I had previously worked as a social accounting clerk, a position that's actually quite low in the chain. I wasn't a team leader or a chief accounting clerk or anything. But you do your job. A client came and placed a claim with you. You looked everything over yourself, you made a calculation, you issued a decision, and you had the client further in your care. The clients knew, ok, my contact person is Mr. Meier and I go to him for everything. We had a complex sphere of activity, where we worked independently. Yeah, a supervisor wasn't constantly coming up to you, saying: and this number here and this statistic and this and that. Rather, it was important that the people for whom you were responsible, that the bulk of their claims were handled in a timely manner, that they received the help they needed. While naturally the colleagues who came from the Berlin agency, a federal office—which was quite odd for us at the beginning—they had some kind of program of action (*Handlungsprogramm*) for every possible procedure that might come up in the average workday. We sometimes joked whether they could handle going to the bathroom alone—no, I didn't say that [laughter], throw that out. No, it was really quite strange. It occurred to us, for example, we had a very, very—actually you could say we had a chummy relationship to our team leader. So the structure—I mean, such a team leader in the Social Services Office, he was dependent on the hard working colleagues. And when we came together with the other colleagues at the agency, we were schooled together, but we discovered with astonishment that there exists a quite pronounced hierarchical way of thinking within the agency. It was really astonishing for me at the beginning... In economic terms, nothing had changed for anyone, but in terms of organization, *yes*.

This placement officer cuts straight to the most salient aspects of the transition from work at the Social Services Office to work at the Federal Employment Agency: the employee-client relationships, on the one hand, and the employee-supervisor relationships, on the other. Given that the Social Services Office didn't exist to place clients into work but to guarantee their subsistence if not their well-being, the accounting clerk established a relationship with them with the expectation that it would continue (“you had the client further in your care”). The internal organization of the two institutions seems likewise to embody two polar extremes. Whereas

supervisors at the Social Services Office were dependent on more or less autonomously operating employees, the reverse proved to be the case in the Federal organizational structure.

Initially, I wondered if complaints about overeager supervisors and their micromanaging tendencies were simply byproducts of the reform. That is, I wondered if supervisors kept an especially close eye on everything given that so many of the employees were working in what was for them very new territory. But a division manager with the Job Center (who did not have a background with the Social Services Office) basically affirmed everything that this placement officer had told me. On the one hand, the manager raised the issue of tension between the two groups of employees when we were discussing what could be changed to improve the current state of affairs.

I would like a more stabile team. You have to imagine, some were once financial service officials or accounting clerks and now they're supposed to advise people. That's often very far from what that person, the financial service official had studied and worked on for many years. And that person is sent here to the Job Center simply because the position there [at the Social Services Office] is now gone... We have colleagues who were socialized in very different systems and that's difficult to manage.

That some friction existed between these two groups, I thought, was to be expected, but it surprised me when the manager complained of the imposing hierarchy.

We are constantly inundated with more intense supervision. Whereas before it was said, ok, make sure you sit down with your people once, now other goals are packed on. Now it's said, ok, I'm counting precisely how many of your people you place in work—not per employee, but per team. We aren't allowed to track that per employee, but per team—and how many customers you can place into this or that program. So there are all of these forces (*Zwänge*) that are placed on a colleague here, plus the conversations [with the customers], which can be very difficult emotionally.

When I spoke with placement officers, it became evident that these abstract constraints made for the most frustrating and least rewarding aspects of their work.

Guidelines need to be met and so you get in a situation where you have an enormous amount to do, namely place people into all manner of programs so that here at the computer you can make this all important “click,” which switches the status from unemployed to employment-seeking (*arbeitsuchend*) when you stick someone in a program. And when you do that a lot, you make the quota, and then the boss, the division manager, is happy because it will show when inquiries are made into the statistics. But I know when someone is in Job Application Training—he is not, thank you very much, in work... The statistical inquiry doesn’t differentiate between a real integration and a One-Euro-50-Job. The box [that you check on the computer] is, so to speak, satisfied and also the supervisors when these numbers are right. If you look behind them yourself, though, you know that you haven’t actually accomplished much, just that the box says “ok” but you know that in a few months I’ll have these people in my office again when the program is over.

Following these stories, one assumes that the Federal Employment Agency is under increasing political pressure to lower the number of unemployed persons and that this pressure cascades, from one level of managers to the next, on down to the numerous placement officers. Further, one might imagine that the placement officers are particularly concerned with qualification, in whatever form, at least in part because it can easily be measured and recorded. If you increase someone’s qualification, you have achieved something that will show up in the statistics. Interestingly, one’s regular presence at a Supplemental Job also has this quality: it is an easily measurable fact that translates into qualification (or disciplinary measures, i.e. sanctions).

In some cases, the customer has difficulty persevering through the average work day. And that can be practiced [in an AGH-MAE] and one can also demonstrate that in one’s curriculum vitae: look here, I accomplished my task for half a year without absences, even if it was in the parameters of a One-Euro-Job, I was there. I’m dependable.

The Job Center placed a truly curious amount of emphasis on attendance, though. I spent time at three MAE programs for youth while I conducted my fieldwork. The first order of business every day was to run through attendance lists, which doesn't sound like a big deal but if there are 30 to 50 people in a program it's pretty easy to lose half an hour this way. Especially when you consider that in some programs attendance is taken multiple times a day so that people don't sneak away during the break. It appeared that the more difficult the participants are imagined to be, the more important attendance became.

“The biggest problem [when you consider the Supplemental Jobs from the perspective of an employer],” a director of a socio-cultural organization told me, “is always the quality of the work completed—on which we have very little influence. Because the quality of work isn't a criterion for the Job Center. For the Job Center the one and only criterion is presence. Was the guy—or woman of course—present every day for 6 hours? Period.” As he continued, he became more animated and it was fairly clear that the issue frustrated him to no end. “No one is interested in quality. Not at all. We also don't write any evaluations at the end that take into account whether it was good work or poor work. He could have fucked around here every day. If he was present for 6 hours, then everything's super. You know? So no one's interested in quality and that's how it goes, too [meaning that the quality of work is very low].”

Negative press constitutes an additional source of pressure weighing on the staff of the Job Center. As the divisional manager that I spoke with indicated, it can lead to motivational problems.

We often appear in the media. I noticed it myself when I started working for the Federal Employment Agency, people only know negative examples, everyone rants about what goes on there: my God how terrible, what kind of nonsense are you up to. Of course that all adds up. And then it's really quite difficult to motivate the colleagues here,

especially with precisely this, for example, the new Four Phase Model.<sup>59</sup> To say, ok, we have to take this step to improve what we do, we need to be a better service provider, we need to work on our advising capability. We are currently schooling our managers in diverse seminars on the theme of managerial activity: how can I support my colleagues, how do I bring about active development of personal, how can I motivate? That's an extremely touchy subject...

From here, the conversation returned seamlessly to the reform period. "And we have to keep working on it. The process of restructuring cost our colleagues so much energy and it continues on permanently. The laws change constantly, we always have something new to implement and that by yesterday..."

## **Conclusion**

There's a way in which Job Center employees themselves have since the reform been subject to a similar mix of arbitrary force (taking on new positions that have little to do with their old ones, submitting themselves to the surveillance of their supervisors, and so on) that their customers contend with. In fact, much of my field work seemed to indicate that the internal organization and managerial style of the Federal Employment Agency has significant consequences for not only how customers experience their unemployment but also for how they relate to work and employment in general.

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed Weber's analysis of two distinct types of relation to work, which can be designated as traditional and spirited. These were found not to be the results merely of differing ideologies. Rather, if the different relations to work are a matter of ideology, then they are so only insofar as a given ideology helps structure a person's relation to work in a particular way. Drawing on what was said about the ego-ideal, it is possible to understand how the doctrine of grace may have accomplished this. Above all, the doctrine of

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<sup>59</sup> The Four Phase Model was a new software program introduced at the Job Centers when I was in the middle of my field work, which is to say 2009. The new program helped placement officers profile customers according to how close they were to the labor market.

grace made salvation entirely a matter of an individual's interiority; nothing a person does, for example, could lead to salvation. Accordingly, the practical result of internalizing this point, that is, of believing that one is saved by virtue of the fact that one is who one is, would be an increase in self-respect and, in turn, an elevation in one's own demands on oneself. Further, one's work became integrally tied up in maintaining one's sense that one was in fact saved. In short, work itself would have become almost exclusively oriented around the problem of self-respect as it lost significance as a means of providing a living. Whether we buy into Weber's historical argument that this is how capitalism arose is beside the point, although I obviously find it fairly convincing. The important point for us is to come to an understanding of two structural poles regarding how one can relate to one's work. In current practice, it is unlikely that they would be mutually exclusive. And Freud was quick to point out himself that under normal circumstances it is difficult if not impossible to differentiate the activity of the super-ego and ego.

The Hartz-reforms employ, I think we can agree, a fairly straightforward logic (even if its implications are not always straightforward), namely to create a rational incentive for as many unemployed people as possible to move towards and accept employment in the regular labor market. This was primarily accomplished by (1) restructuring benefits around a minimum for existence and (2) creating a system of sanctions that would actually be imposed with some regularity. As Weber indicated, "lowering wages to force (*zwingen*) the worker to accomplish more than previously" has been a common tactic to increase worker productivity (83). Nevertheless, "mechanical manipulations of money are in general not enough to bring about the 'education' (*Erziehung*) to capitalist culture" (118). To the extent that the post-Hartz welfare state has activated the unemployed and integrated them into employment, it has done so by underlining a rational-strategic relation to work. For it activates with either the incentive to earn

more or the threat of earning less and integrates by establishing qualifications on the basis of presence regardless of quality of engagement. While I am drifting towards gross simplifications here, there is no legal or institutional basis for arguing that the Hartz reforms might have led individuals to connect work in any way to self-regard. Accordingly, I find no reason to believe that the Hartz reforms had or will have any real success in getting individuals to be “self-activated,” which was the intended effect of the reformers.

Es werden nicht die belohnt die wirklich wollen, es werden die gestraft die nicht wollen.  
(The ones who actually want to aren't rewarded; the ones who don't want to are punished.)

-Workfare participant

Es ist zu mühsam, auszuklamüsern  
was alles dieses nixtun fördert  
(It's too much hassle to disentangle myself from  
all that supports this doing-nothing)

-Absztrakkt in "Zeit" by JAW

4.

## Stories of One-Euro-Work

### Introduction: Sebastian's story and the question of ethnography

A mutual acquaintance had put me into contact with Sebastian. When I called, he said he'd be happy meet me and tell me about his experiences with the Job Center, MAEs, and all the rest. So we arranged to meet outside of a large department store on Alexanderplatz. I had similarly arranged a number of interviews while in the field: agreeing on a time and a location that was mutually convenient, my interlocutor and I would then make our way to a café or some other quiet corner. In cases where I hadn't previously met the interviewee, I was always curious—would I be able to identify the person in a crowd? Would the person bear some visible sign, be it as a matter of the body, clothing, or comportment, of the fact that their income had been reduced to a minimum for existence, that they had become caught up in a highly stigmatized system? But the only thing any of my informants ever had in common in this regard—the way that I ended up identifying them in a crowd—was that their behavior indicated they were looking for someone; everyone else was simply going about their business. As people entered and exited the department store, Sebastian and I recognized each other immediately as we were the only two people not going about our business. Streaks of grey complimented his

dark hair as his white dress shirt did his blue jeans; a thick walrus mustache covered most of his upper lip. He just looked European to me: refined tastes complimented his rugged masculinity. And so he blended otherwise perfectly into the throng of tourists, shoppers, and afternoon strollers.

Sebastian was born in Austria in the mid 1950s but lived in southern Germany for roughly half of his life. Already as a teenager, he began his training as a chef and later studied hotel management in college. His resume includes stints at restaurants across Europe, primarily in Germany and Austria. In 2000, he went into business with his significant other. They opened a small hotel, which wasn't a huge success but everything was basically fine during the four years that they ran it. Eventually, the responsibilities of operating the hotel overwhelmed Sebastian's partner and she decided to call it quits. Since they had made an agreement in the beginning that they were in it together or, in other words, if one quit, both would quit, this meant that the business would have to be sold. As he is telling me this story, Sebastian pauses. "I still regret this even today, because—from this very point in time—my life started to fall apart." Given that Sebastian no longer had any living relatives, he decided to move to Berlin with his significant other, which is where she was from. Despite the fact that they had been together for nine years, they split up after three months in Berlin.

Sebastian took a position as a restaurant manager in a western province of Berlin and worked in the position for a year before there were "violent agitations." The chief executive in Munich called for the restaurant to be restructured. Everyone that had been working at this location was to be let go, because—according to the executive's justification—these people looked at work simply as a matter of course (*Selbstverständlichkeit*), as if the continuation of their positions into the future had been implicit in their positions at the restaurant today; they

were accordingly no longer working for the profit of the restaurant and neither were they fully serving the guests; they showed up for work at around 11 and floated around until 11:30 despite the fact that they were supposed to start working at 11; they had, in short, neglected their work. Sebastian agreed to help restructure the restaurant staff—obviously he would have been out of a job had he refused to comply with the mandate. There were somewhere between 20 and 25 employees at the restaurant and Sebastian managed to switch out the entire team down to one remaining employee that survived the restructuring besides himself. “That wasn’t easy,” Sebastian tells me.

Sebastian was to hire twice as many new employees as the restaurant needed. The point was to narrow the pool down over the course of a month to the most capable and motivated, and everyone agreed to this system as a condition of their employment. There was one additional condition: since there were so many employees, they would work on an 800 Euro per month basis for which they would work a maximum of 30 to 40 hours a week. At the end of the first month, roughly half of the employees remained. Sebastian was basically content with how the restructuring had proceeded, but then the chief executive indicated that they would stick with this pay rate. Sebastian’s problem was of course that he had promised all of the new employees—with the guarantee from higher management—that pay would increase at the end of the first month. When this turned out not to be the case, the new employees were of course upset and so came to Sebastian with their complaints. “The executive was only rarely at the restaurant, so everyone was pissed at me. And the end of the story is that there was a huge uproar.” Sebastian apologized to the recent hires, worked late until about 3am and then waited for an executive to come in at around 6 or 7am. Sebastian gave an ultimatum: either the executive reconsider the pay rate or Sebastian would walk. They argued and argued but to no end. Sebastian waited until his

team showed up again for work, apologized, and told them that they would have to speak with the executive. “And that was my last day of work there.”

“But that wasn’t yet *bad*.” A previous co-worker partnered with Sebastian to renovate a huge restaurant with seating for 300 and a garden. Once again, Sebastian was to manage the kitchen. As the project progressed, they received so many catering orders that they decided to make that an autonomous business. Everything was going well until his partner came across an even more promising entrepreneurial endeavor that would take him back to Italy. Sebastian briefly tried to maintain the catering business but he couldn’t keep up without the kitchen and someone to run deliveries since he didn’t have a driver’s license. So that, too, fell through.

Sebastian then worked at a number of festivals—beer carts and such—to make ends meet until he was offered an opportunity to work in Australia. Another previous co-worker from Austria had since moved abroad and was running a highly rated hotel in Sydney. “What could go wrong here, right?” They made arrangements in August 2006 for Sebastian to start in January 2007. In the meantime, though, he had lost all of his savings—everything that he was able to build up in about 20 years of employment—in his various entrepreneurial projects. So Sebastian registered himself as unemployed in order to help stabilize his financial situation before the move. “Everything that happened next was fate,” he told me. Because he had been self-employed and hadn’t been paying unemployment insurance premiums, he fell directly into Unemployment Benefits II. But that wasn’t much of an issue as we was moonlighting, taking on undocumented work in order to supplement the existence-securing benefits.

“And my problem, what happened to me then is that in Fall 2006—very slowly—one doesn’t really notice—but I speak that way now—my teeth fell out. So I have—through my speech, I conceal it. I have become accustomed to doing that now.” As he’s telling me this, he

also exaggerates his technique of concealment and points to his lips, which barely move when he speaks in a slow, remarkably controlled and hence mostly flat manner. At this point, it strikes me that the walrus mustache has an important function to fulfill: it at once contributes to concealing his missing teeth in a straightforward physical way but also orients Sebastian's interlocutor towards associations of masculinity and away from associations of poverty otherwise signaled by missing teeth.

And I was raised in such a way that I...uhh...can't approach a guest like this. Regardless of how many people tell me that no one notices. I, for my part, I know it. And I can't serve as a person—I can't provide a handsome service or—you know what I mean? For my head that's, that's simply stuck in it. I have problems with depression and so...I don't know. In this time, all in all 10 teeth fell out. And to fix it would have cost more money than I had at that point.

Sebastian had already bought his tickets, rented out his apartment, and sold his furniture. But he didn't trust himself to make the trip. "Because I was afraid that I would go there and he would say, No—Sebastian, all well and good, you're still funny and dear, but I can't do this [i.e. hire someone with so many teeth missing]. That's how I came to the MAE. It might sound egoistic, but I have precisely the opposite problem." He continued to receive job offers but he never went; he would be scheduled to work but couldn't bring himself to show up for the first day. "It's not that I have the problem of not receiving any job offers—at this point, I of course do, because I was supposed to start working at so many places in Berlin—which happily don't know me by face, only by name—but I didn't show up." Sebastian trails off and is staring at the table. "I have amazing references, I have—. And that's how I wound up with an MAE."

"I'd give my left hand, if things would just be normal for me again," he continues.

The world would fall apart if someone would laugh at me. Anyone. If anyone would make a joke. You can say come on Sebastian, there's worse. That's true. The other side is if someone would smile at me

queerly then it would be over, then it would get serious, then I wouldn't be able to get out of my bed anymore. And I don't want that.

I ask how much the dental work would cost. "Somewhere around three." "Thousand?"

"Mmhhh. It's nothing really, it's so nothing for a person in a normal situation. But holes are always opening and none of them ever really close." He's referring here to the way in which small emergencies—anytime a small appliance breaks or some other unexpected cost arises—can derail his budget such that he is unable to recover. Numerous people (psychologists, Job Center employees, NGO administrators) have promised in the past three years to help him finance the dental work but to no avail. It's apparently impossible to get that kind of money together from the Job Center, even as a loan, to pay for cosmetic surgery that would not directly enable him to work. And he's too ashamed of the situation to ask a potential employer to front the money, which might be possible but is nevertheless unlikely given how competitive the job market is in the restaurant industry. "These absurd thoughts keep coming: how much have you in your life given out just in tips—if I just had that now." He's even rekindled old religious practices. He goes to church and prays, but—"what's supposed to happen, you know?"

"The worst part of all this for me is that my social life has in the past two, two and a half years been crippled. When you pull yourself back as I have, then others pull back too. The social contacts that would do you so much good—and you just cut yourself off all the more. There would be plenty of people who say Oh, come on, let's go..." He waves his hands in the air a bit indicating the abundance of mundane activities that one could engage in. "But you don't allow it." He tells me about still having most of his wardrobe, about maintaining hygiene despite not having hot water so that people don't recognize him as someone living in poverty. "I still have a bit of pride. That's the last remnant that I have. And if that also would fall apart—" I ask him what the future

holds. “I think that you have to be further down and then at some point, when you’ve hit bottom, when you are no longer at all ashamed of yourself—then you get help somehow.”

If I don’t manage to orient myself differently—beginning with my own head—my future is a zero. Because I don’t have a chance through the state, through its measures. Because the measures are such that—there is a dumb saying in Germany: too much to die but too little to live. If everything’s normal and you have a problem, then you approach it very differently. When I had a problem before, I would rather it be handled yesterday than today. Now things are such that when you put off dealing with the problem it helps somehow because by doing that you—how should I say—you’re not so confronted with the problem because you already have enough other ones. Today things are such that you wait until the third warning with the hope that some kind of salvation will come in the meantime but it just gets worse because at some point the house of cards falls.

Sebastian had been reluctant to have the interview at a café because he didn’t have any money for a coffee. I told him that his time and thoughts would be very helpful for my research and that I’d be happy to pick up the tab. When I paid, he thanked me and promised that he would be back on his feet again soon. I didn’t have any doubts. We had spoken at length about the ins and outs of the restaurant industry—well beyond what I’ve noted here—and it was clear that he had an impressive grasp on how to run a restaurant in a tough market and squeeze every last dime out of its potential in the process. If any of the workfare participants were going to make the leap back into a successful professional life, I told myself, it would be Sebastian. “When I’m back on my feet again, I’ll give you a call and return the favor [i.e. take me out for coffee].” He took my cell number and I told him that I looked forward to the call. I never heard back from Sebastian.

Ethnographic investigations into welfare reform are often used to undermine a hegemonic discourse, which emerges out of ideologically charged policy discussions and indicates that prior welfare recipients are better off for having been integrated into employment. By calling attention

to the numerous contradictions, complications, and above all multiple meanings of value, ethnographies of welfare reform bring the voices of the affected to bear on questions of policy (Churchill 1995; Little 1999; Morgen 2001; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003). Whereas so much scholarship has focused on the ways in which different actors involved in this system construct different meanings regarding key aspects of the system, my ethnographic work revealed a remarkable coherence in the way that people were analyzing and interpreting their own experience with the workfare programs. Granted, significant multiplicities do emerge as well. Sebastian's story can in this regard serve to underline the way in which ethnography can reveal concrete examples of difficulty and suffering that cannot be categorized or solved by any of the given policy discussions or instruments. There is a way in which Sebastian's story asserts itself as a unique problem that the new workfare state in Germany cannot overcome as it is currently structured. For my larger argument, though, this is not the most interesting aspect of Sebastian's story. One could always turn up cases that stand outside of or don't fit nicely into a hegemonic discourse through ethnographic investigation<sup>60</sup>—and that can be necessary to suggest new policy directions and bring about social change. What's interesting here, though, is the way in which so many different actors employ similar critical rationalities in their engagement with workfare in Germany.

Consider, for example, what Sebastian told me when I asked if he thought that the MAE improved his chances of finding employment. “No. Not a bit, not a bit. It's like this: the nice thing that's built into it is that you can—should—must—have a two month internship.” A very similar case will be discussed below, but the point is that Sebastian makes a very curious

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<sup>60</sup> This is essentially Derrida's point in regard to structuralism: “On the one hand, structuralism justifiably claims to be the critique of empiricism. But at the same time there is not a single book by or study by Lévi-Strauss which is not proposed as an empirical essay which can always be completed or invalidated by new information. The structural schemata are always proposed as hypotheses resulting from a finite quantity of information and which are subjected to proof of experience” (1978, 288).

correction of his relationship to what he finds most valuable about the MAE in terms of its potential to help him find work. The best that you get becomes what you have to do. In other words, he appropriates the critical logic that begins with the point that the MAEs are forced labor. Sebastian went on to offer a cynical description of internships where the employer makes use of them as a source of cheap labor so as to avoid hiring anyone into a regular position, which of course echoes to some extent his own experience. Sebastian is completely unable to see himself and his own professional development in the internship and perceives it instead as an opportunity for an employer to profit from his labor. And of course it is that, too; I don't mean to argue that it isn't. But virtually every employment opportunity under capitalism is so constituted that the wage laborer produces more value than he or she ultimately receives in payment for his or her labor. The question remains, why can't Sebastian at all see a mutual benefit involved in the internship. The answer is not simply that the hegemonic critical discourse precludes it, but it must nevertheless be regarded as a contributing factor that Sebastian is unable to find himself in his workfare position.

In this chapter, I will follow the winding stories primarily of the workfare participants that I spoke with in Berlin as they discuss their relationships to the Job Center (and hence the state in terms of a concrete point of contact) and to the MAEs. While the stories will constantly spill over the bounds of the hegemonic critical discourse on welfare reform in Germany, they will more often return in curious ways to precisely those critical rationalities that one might otherwise find in the newspaper, which as we will come to see is not entirely coincidental to the structure of time in an MAE.

## **I. “Customers” and their relationships to the Job Center**

Numerous workfare participants spoke of a negative if not antagonistic relationship to the Job Center. On the one hand, it is not entirely surprising that their frustrations with finding a job in a difficult job market or satisfying their needs with minimal means would become focused on the institution whose task it is to facilitate both of these processes. On the other hand, placement officers at the Job Centers now function as what amounts to external super-egos insofar as they place demands on workfare participants and hold them up to certain standards of behavior. Consider how a placement officer described some of the difficulties that she faced with the transition to contingent benefits.

Above all the work with the customers was very difficult. The customer who to that point received Social Assistance was not accustomed to someone telling him to go somewhere every month to be asked what he had done in order to find employment. These customers weren't used to that. Those were the beginning times, I know. We still have security here in house. I believe all Job Centers have that. But earlier a security guard stood in every hallway, because the conversations were very—yeah—heated. And this rethinking on the part of the customer to say: ok, I get money from the state and then that's not the end of it; rather, I must now exert myself; I have to come here regularly; there is someone who is going to take a look at what I've done; he also exerts himself for me—and that's a good thing. But there are definitely customers who still don't accept that someone asks what they are doing in order to find work, what have you done, have you applied for anything in the last month. There are definitely customers—especially the youth—when you ask, there's always people who say *we have done everything in order to find work, I would accept any job*. And when I say, when did you write your last application?—last year in August. And I say, then you haven't done everything in order to find work. What have you done for the last year? There were such conversations earlier.

Interestingly, the placement officers of Germany's new workfare state are anything but indifferent. Michael Herzfeld has of course argued that indifference is the quintessential subjective position vis-à-vis those one serves in a bureaucratic context (1992). While indifference does also emerge in the Job Centers of Berlin, many workfare participants spoke of

the curious personal attachment that Job Center employees seemed to have regarding the funds that they presided over. “*They act as if it’s their money,*” I heard again and again. And I’m very much of the opinion that many placement officers view the money in precisely that way. The matter in fact came up directly in one of my interviews with a placement officer. He was discussing the financial difficulties of small businesses in the current economic situation—the livelihood of his spouse was apparently at stake—“But here,” he tells me. “Here we get it just dumped on us. I pay taxes yeah too as a civil servant. And when you sit in such a position where it’s so [he throws his hands in the air as if to be throwing money]—that’s frustrating, that’s really frustrating.” It would seem that particularly those persons who feel as if they themselves are just scraping by become unusually invested in making reasonable use of state funds and hence also encouraging the long-term unemployed to find employment that would satisfy one’s basic needs. The question in this regard might be whether the bureaucratic locus of the workfare state generates more concern than indifference insofar as it opens the possibility of “saving” money in the sense that it for the first time has any number of strategies, techniques, and mechanisms for facilitating the transition from unemployment to self-sufficiency.

The workfare participants that I interviewed, though, generally didn’t indicate that their conversations at Job Centers made them feel guilty. If anything, they saw the requests to send out applications as useless tasks to accomplish in order to continue to receive their benefits—as if to “earn” their money they had to experience the non-productivity and futility of their laboring. In order to get at the relationships that workfare participants had with their placement officers and the Job Centers more generally, I asked informants what expectations they had for the Job Center and what sorts of help they eventually received when they registered themselves as unemployed. One person had this to say in response, “None. They always say, hmm, Job Center: they’ll help

you. And about the only thing they manage is fumbling around with numbers until you're somehow out of the statistics. But what you have to say to that as Hartz-IV patient—that doesn't interest them." Here and more or less throughout my conversations with workfare participants, one hears the echoes of the critical discourse, which I discussed in Chapter 1. Worth noting, though, is of course the way in which this person rhetorically constructs a legitimate critical position by framing his own experience and knowledge in relation to an indefinite "they" (the second and third "they" refer concretely to the Job Center) who doesn't know what's going on at the Job Centers. In a sense, then, this informant empowers himself through a critical unmasking of the function of the Job Center (they don't help you, they make you disappear). Further, his critical understanding of the institution is directly related to how he understands and identifies himself—as a *Hartz-IV Patient* (the German and English are the same here). He explained that by "patient" he meant that he was "totally at the mercy" (*ausgeliefert*) of the legal and institutional system known colloquially as Hartz IV as if it were an incurable disease.<sup>61</sup> He also told me that this usage was common among his friends and acquaintances—and a few confirmed this fact as they happened by during our conversation, which we had at a bar. I have no real way of knowing to what extent this usage is common across Berlin or Germany, but I only heard it in southeast Berlin, an area serviced by a Job Center with a particularly negative reputation among workfare recipients (likewise a Job Center that wanted nothing to do with my ethnographic work on the so-called One-Euro-Jobs).

By empowering himself on the basis of a critical relation to the Job Center, though, this workfare participant likewise negated the possibility of using the Job Center as a means of

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<sup>61</sup> I have never come across any direct references to the fact that Hartz IV—strictly on the level of the signifier—is strikingly similar to the abbreviation for the disease that causes aids (in German it is likewise commonly referred to as *HIV*). Nevertheless, I often wondered if this association was being made subconsciously. It would *help* explain why Hartz IV—as a name—became so pervasive and why it has such a negative connotation. Here, at any rate, it is hard to deny that the association is operative.

advancing his own vocational or personal interests. In other words, he allows himself to be a subject of the Job Center (so as to criticize its role in destroying his agency) and accordingly does not allow himself to be the subject of a career, which would demand that he use the Job Center in order to facilitate this or that training opportunity, this or that internship, or similar. The way in which I have simplified this opposition—as if the informant has a clear choice between being a subject of the Job Center or being the subject of a career—likely doesn't exist in practice. The matter is more complicated and involves, on the one hand, the consequences of the shock of unemployment and, on the other hand, the consequences of long-term unemployment.

We must acknowledge, though, the fundamental difference between a workfare participant who mobilizes the linguistic capacities that make possible the critical discourse on welfare reform in Germany and a member of the cultural elite, i.e. journalist or academic, who does the same from the position of an established career. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, premised on the clear division of society into dominating and dominated classes is of marginal use here in explaining this difference. He defines symbolic power "as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself" (Bourdieu 1991, 170). And we can apply this definition to the matter at hand: it is certainly as if the cultural elite had established the real relation between the workfare participants and the Job Center, first, by characterizing that relation in terms—let us say in short—of a destruction or exploitation of their agency and, second, by convincing the participants that this is in fact the case (through dissemination of the critique in multiple media sources) such that they behave accordingly. But the issue isn't so much that the workfare participants are being dominated by the cultural elite, it's that they aren't being dominated in a way that would benefit them as it does a journalist or an

academic. A person who practices journalism as a profession is dominated by that profession in the sense that it requires this person to produce certain linguistic products of a certain kind and in a certain quantity that can be sold at the end of the day for a profit. When a workfare participant criticizes the Job Center it is not as part of any professional requirements or expectations but as a substitute for them. Hence they also do not result in payment or profit except perhaps as the increase of rather precarious symbolic power.

One might be tempted to argue that the informant who had identified himself as a Hartz-IV patient was simply expressing his real experience at the Job Center, marked as it is by a nightmarish silence despite every effort to make himself heard. And I can provide additional ethnographic evidence from other workfare participants for such a position. One person complained, “if you politely ask a question, you get an answer to an entirely different question that you didn’t even ask, you know. These people are so full of negative stress that it affects everyone.” Sebastian told me of a similar incident when he went to the Job Center to turn in a cost estimate from the dentist.

I knew this was all for nothing, but I said ok, I’ll get a report on what the work would cost and I’ll bring it in. I go there so early that—I’m there at 7am or so and they don’t open until 8:15, give or take. So I’m the first person to appear at this particular station that morning—so it’s not like she would be in a bad mood because 50 people have already been through and given her trouble. No, I was the first person that day. I would like to see Ms. N—, I have to give her this cost estimate. No “good morning,” nothing. *Who do you think you are—she’s almost shouting—I’ve been working here for 30 years, that woman doesn’t handle such things.* I only asked that she let me through—I didn’t do anything else, nothing. I just said ‘good morning, I would like to see Ms. N—, she’s expecting me.’ Nope, you can’t do that, you can’t do that. She didn’t put me on a list, nothing. So I ended up putting it in the mailbox.

There’s no shortage of curious stories involving recipients of Unemployment Benefits II and Job Center staff. Accordingly, there is some “truth” to the previously mentioned claim—there’s a

way in which one's voice can be ignored such that one's agency in a communicative context is essentially negated. But I'm less interested in how accurate a workfare participant's stories may or may not be than I am in the general cultural framework surrounding these welfare reforms and the consequences of occupying this or that position within the cultural framework. In other words, I'm interested in what kinds of subjectivizing positions exist here but even more so in the possibility of not being a subject in a sense that could ultimately benefit a given workfare participant. The normative power of a professional identity (or career in Weber's sense) constitutes a key site to investigate this matter.

If there were any awkward moments in my conversations with workfare participants, it was when I asked them how they would identify themselves professionally. Some simply said "I'm unemployed" and looked at me as if I were an idiot for asking. A few said "job-seeking" (*arbeitssuchend*), which is the official term for a person participating in a workfare program. Another who was marginally employed at the time of the interview readily responded "travel agent—but I have trained in so many careers that I can actually do just about anything—but also not that well, it must of course be said." The reason why I asked the question in the first place was that I was curious about the fate of previously established professional identities after significant lengths of unemployment just as I was curious how one would navigate the workfare state without the orienting function of a professional identity.

One informant gave me her CV prior to our interview and my first question was how she would summarize a CV that entailed such professional multiplicity.

Are you familiar with this inspector Monk? *Monk* is a great television series—very psychological—about this detective that lives in San Francisco and helps the police with his intuitive capacities—and at the same time, he's a psychopath himself. And he always says that his abilities are a gift and a curse. What I mean by that—I believe I really have many small talents and that's also the problem. And what is perhaps

less clear [regarding my CV] is that I was intensely political in the 80's—radically political. It all started with the peace movement, which shaped my youth: the NATO Double Track decision, cruise missiles, and that whole story. But after unification, that was all gone. The wall fell and I experienced my first bout with depression. At the same time, I hadn't pursued a career with any intensity on account of my political youth. Money and social status are of relatively little value for me in comparison with other values like, well, friendship and networks. And in the last 5 years, also spirituality. Whereby I worked a lot as a volunteer without earning anything because that made more sense to me. For example, down here [pointing to one of the last positions on the CV]: this petroleum company. I did good work there and I was paid well but—in the long term—my money can't come from the oil industry. In the long term, I can't be a travel agent because I can't sell what I wouldn't want to be given to me as a gift. And that's my problem. I'm too—honest, perhaps. Or too—idealistic, now as ever. That's why I've tried out so many things and have never lasted long professionally because it made use of too little of my entire personality.

Important here is that this workfare participant obviously held highly articulated political ideals that in turn have oriented and determined her courses of action. But this political identity qua normative framework renders her difficult to integrate into the labor market, because—from the point of view of the labor market—she hasn't pursued anything long enough professionally to have developed readily marketable skills, at least not in any straightforward, easily identifiable way.

Often, as I say though, the workfare participant didn't know how to answer the question, which led me to believe that there was no effective professional identity present. The following conversation is exemplary in that a question about identity turns into a conversation about the Job Center.

“How would you identify yourself professionally?” What do you mean professionally—this doesn't have anything to do with MAEs? “It's more of a general question: when you're looking for work in the classified ads or online, there are any number of directions in which you can look—.” I have three different directions. First—I've come to learn that I would be a great Social Worker, which I didn't know at the age of 16. But I did

everything with my son instinctively—without experience, you’re not born as a mother; you collect experiences as to how you do it. But instinctively I did everything right. Social Work would really—I’ve come to learn that it fulfills me. To give encouragement; to give direction to people who’ve lost their way—I would really be into that. “Have you discussed this with the staff at the Job Center?” They’ve never asked me “What do you mean ‘never asked’?” What my interests are. “Nooo, seriously?” Nope, nope. They have always just said—because I’m so spunky and I always say what I think. The people at the Job Center came to my defense in that harassment case and found it right that I spoke out. They know my ways. My contact person, I’ve had her for three years, she knows my ways. And she would like to have me at the Job Center. She’s told me a number of times—because she’s gotten to know me over the course of time, what all I do to find jobs or what I’m like, and how that all looks on paper: I have the qualification for it. She says every time *you’d be the right person*. You know, I would speak frankly with unemployed persons who don’t want to do anything. And I would definitely recognize and motivate the person who is putting in effort. You know what I mean, those that don’t want to do anything get a few pithy words from me. But those who are striving—there are those too, I have to say. I count myself among them. But they don’t get a chance for this or that reason. She recognized that I can do that well and she would like to bring me into Social Services somewhere but they don’t have any money. She says that every time. “To return to the question of your interests: what exactly do you talk about then when you go to the Job Center if not about your interests?” When you come in there for a meeting, one hour is available for you. One hour. And you can already strike off a fourth of it because the previous person isn’t finished. And when you’re finally in there, then she’ll look around in her computer for your files. And there goes another 15 minutes. Very casually (*ganz nebenbei*), she asks a few questions. Very casually so that she doesn’t look so stupid. And there’s already a half hour gone. Then she prints out a new Consent— (*Einverständnis*), a new Agreement Procedure Document (*Eingliederungsverfahren Dokument*). A couple of pages. And there’s another 15 minutes, because something’s going on with the computer or something and she’ll have to start over. And very casually she asks something tacky (*billig*), something casual. Then she prints out 10 pages and I sign it. And then I have five minutes left and that was it. The next one is already waiting. Or I’ll be in there—this has happened *every time*—and someone else comes in and steals yet more of your hour because he wants to know something from her, you know. A co-worker—ach, could you help me with this or that. And she disappears out of the room and is gone 10 minutes and then she comes back and apologizes and so—but you know what I mean? It’s just a mess of

number checking-off. The six months is up, I've seen the woman, she's still living. But help. Actual help—niente. Niente. Niente. That's how the time passes. Paper-stuff, signature—then there's no paper in the printer, so another five minutes while she looks for paper. [We're both laughing.] Yeah, yeah, can you imagine that?

Instructive here is the point that communication between this workfare participant and her placement officer is something that occurs “on the side.” It was not clear to me on the basis of this interview how this workfare participant who went to school for hotel management and was re-schooled in industrial sales could possibly also be qualified for social work, and I didn't press the point. My best guess based on this interview which lasted well over an hour (without time lost looking for printer paper) was that her placement officer's comment that she would be “perfect” for a position at the Job Center was part of casual communication or, in other words, not entirely serious. I know from speaking with other placement officers that it does in fact occur that the long-term unemployed are hired on as Job Center staff, by which I mean to say that if this informant was in all honesty the perfect person to work in a Job Center then she would probably be working in a Job Center. Given that communication seems to occur as a matter of form and not as a serious attempt to figure out how a given person might be reintegrated into the labor market, this informant experiences time in a curious way at the Job Center. According to E.P. Thompson, the experience of time in wage labor as something not belonging to oneself but rather whomever has paid for that time is a key disciplining mechanism in industrial capitalism. Time at the Job Center doesn't seem to have that character at all. On the one hand, the informant discusses time as if it belonged to her (someone comes in and “steals” her time) but it's likewise a period in which nothing of substance occurs: papers are printed and signed, small talk is made, and one disappears for another 6 months.

Many informants discussed the experience of unemployment as a tremendous shock. First, and perhaps most expectedly, they discussed the shock strictly in financial terms. “That was really brutal,” one informant told me who had been running an apartment cleaning business before the ownership of the complex changed hands and left him unemployed. “My income fell from somewhere around 2,500 Euro to 350 Euro—that was a serious cut. My standard of living was much higher—that was 2000 Euro less.” Insofar as consumption constitutes a primary site of identity formation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 4), the income shock involved in losing one’s job has profound implications not only for one’s social life but also for one’s very identity. I’ll return more concretely to the consequences of this transition below. The following story indicates the potential significance of this shock as a severe restriction of agency that then also has repercussions in terms of psychological stability and wellbeing.

I was never unemployed. I knew nothing of it, absolutely nothing. It was a huge shock for me. I was for the first time in my life—I didn’t have my life in my own hands. I was dependent on others and that was entirely new. I have a son and I raised him—*well*—on my own. I always determined my own life and I think I’ve done a pretty good job of maintaining order. And for the first time in my life, my life was determined by others (*fremdbestimmt*). I couldn’t orchestrate my own fate and that brought me very much into self-doubt (*Selbstzweifel*). I’m a motivator, I’m an optimist, but you can really fall into a hole here. And you have to be internally quite strong so that you don’t reach for drugs or alcohol. Thank God I didn’t do that. I always told myself things will change. But that was such a serious, serious breach of my personality: I couldn’t do anything. I was forced to do nothing (*gezwungen zum Nichtstun*). Forced.

What comes into view here is the manner in which the relations of production exert force on the unemployed. She shifts the focus of the critical discourse from the state as a force that defies her will to the labor market, which forces her into a state of non-productivity. We can generalize the effects of this kind of shock to recipients of Unemployment Benefits II who are looking for work with the goal of receiving employment and not just maintaining the good favor of the Job Center

and yet constantly receive confirmation of the limits of their ability to determine their own fate. “I believe I have shot out around 500 applications by now,” one informant told me. What kind of effect must that have on one to receive 500 rejection letters without any prospect of employment? As the informant quoted above points out, the answer must be severe self-doubt and the experience of the power of others to determine her life course.

Some informants tended to use the Job Center strictly to secure their basic existence. “My expectation for the Job Center was primarily money—simply to receive money,” one person told me. “In order to pay rent and so on?” I asked. “Rent and such, precisely. And besides that I don’t have any expectations, because one can’t actually expect anything from the Job Center.” “What do you mean?”

When you have bad luck, you get something pushed on you (*angedrückt*), which you don’t actually want. And when you do want something, you generally have problems getting it. My case here is the exception, because my case worker is very good. I received—when was that—in 2005, I received a three month training position for energy consulting and a friend of mine had an MAE here, a One-Euro-Job. And she said that everything was pretty relaxed here and so on. So I thought, yeah, when this thing is over, I’ll go see about the MAE. And so I met with the director here. He told me what was available here and I thought it was fascinating and now, it’s true, I am here—of my own volition (*eigener Wahl*)—hopeless. [He’s referring here to his general relationship to the MAE, which was that it wasn’t going to get him anywhere.] At any rate, everything that I received from the Job Center was through my own initiative (*Eigeninitiative*), because I went there and said “I want this.” Otherwise you just get a bunch of crap.

This person, then, went on to frame the relationship between himself and the Job Center as largely arbitrary. Although he acknowledges that he got what he wanted on the basis of his own initiative, it was only possible to achieve that because he had the good fortune of being in the hands of a particularly good caseworker—otherwise “you generally have problems getting it.” So, it’s about luck, whether you have good luck or bad luck and not, at the end of the day, how

persistent you are in fighting for what you perceive to be your own interests. It's not a coincidence, then, that he also had no expectations for the Job Center outside of the basic monetary allowances. Along similar lines, another workfare participant stressed the organic connection that must exist between the Job Center and the participant in order for things to go well for the participant.

There's one thing you have to understand, these One-Euro-Fifty-Things, they are beloved and desired (*beliebt und begehrt*) to such an extent that you really have to get along well with your Contact Person or Case Manager such that he assigns you something reasonable. There's also that. That's about the only use I have for them [the Job Center staff].

Jens had similar things to say in response to my question as to what he expects from the Job Center:

Absolutely nothing. Likewise previously. I was—1985, I became unemployed for the first time and the support service, at that point it was called Social Services (*Sozialamt*), totally normal [as opposed to the foreign term Job Center], which was so—when I found something then it was through my own effort (*auf eigene Bemühung*), classified ads in newspapers, and so on. So I expected—definitively—absolutely nothing from Social Services. On the contrary, I have always more or less felt, I still only feel managed (*verwaltet*)—in other words totally unproductive. At this point, they are already happy when I don't show up because I'm always nagging them about some support or provision. I mean, they are actually happy when I turn in a new proposal every six months [to renew his current position, which is a subsidized position] so they can just keep making the payments. That way it's quiet.

Jens's experiences with the Job Center seem to be influenced by the working conditions there: overworked employees are unable to provide him any service. Interestingly, it would seem that there is a disciplinary effect that consistently emerges in relation to one's experiences with the bureaucratic regulation of the new workfare state. Workfare participants discover that it's up to them, that if they don't conceive and develop their own employment goals then no one else will

provide those services for them. In this way, one of the primary intended effects of workfare—self-initiative—emerges as an unintended consequence of an overextended bureaucracy.

Liesel framed the uselessness of the Job Center in terms reminiscent of the workfare participant who identified himself as a Hartz-IV patient.

From the Job Center—in general—you can expect very little help, because one often—not always, not everywhere—one is often thrown into a single pot: unwilling to work (*arbeitscheu*), no interest in work, loafing around, allowing oneself to be supported by Father State. They don't even take a look at the people that they have sitting in front of them. I for my part look at people according to their external appearance a bit. At the Social Services office [i.e. Job Center] one very rarely finds people such as you as you sit before me—in terms of your clothing and your demeanor [for the record, I wasn't wearing anything formal, just jeans and a polo shirt—remarkable only in the sense that it was laundered and didn't show any significant signs of wear]. So it's really noticeable when a person in my clothing or a person in your clothing, with your vibrancy, with my vibrancy, when such a person appears at the Social Services office. But they are so business-blind, I would say, so career-blind, that they don't even notice such a thing. They have a case to handle with me and they want to handle that as quickly as possible. I am for them a case. I am not a living being, I am not an individual.

The time pressure under which Job Center staff labors apparently further undermines Liesel's sense of self and what is for her the core on which her pride is based: her appearance. Perhaps because the Job Center staff is unable to acknowledge her efforts to distinguish herself, she likewise doesn't see the Job Center as a context in which she can further her interests. It is, rather, a space in which she perceives the loss of her unique identity. Another informant echoed precisely this loss of individually oriented service.

Sometimes I say I'm a professional when it comes to the Job Center. I've been there again and again since '93. I know the non-functioning sides. Because—when you expect of them that they'll attend to you individually and that they'll guide you in the right or in a reasonable direction—that's often not the case. And precisely during the first years that I was unemployed, I didn't yet have a vocational qualification (*Berufsabschluss*); I had my Abitur and vocational experience. They

could have actually offered me any number of jobs and I wouldn't have had a good reason to turn it down. But nothing came. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

If one unintended disciplinary effect of a bureaucracy that doesn't further the interests of those it serves is an increase in self-initiative, then this disciplinary effect would seem also to emerge only after many years spent waiting for help that doesn't come. And this constitutes one of the more problematic paradoxes of welfare and workfare in Germany. One wonders whether the expertise and self-initiative that one develops on the basis of dealing with this bureaucratic apparatus over the course of years might contribute to the lock-in effect, whereby—once one has mastered how to navigate the bureaucracy—perhaps one mobilizes that expertise to get one MAE after another instead of getting an MAE in order to develop one's professional agenda.

What Liesel characterized as career-blindness—the inability of Job Center staff to perceive her individuality given their rush—another informant considered in terms of money saving strategy.

It's simply the case that incredible amounts of money—ok, so you have to separate the Federal Employment Agency and the Job Center and the Federal Employment Agency brought in billions of gains because the entire Social Assistance people fell out of their services. And the support monies that are thrown out for them—yeah, for us—. I say that it's thrown-away money; they have misused it insofar as most of the money goes to administration, the administration of activity-providers (*Fördergesellschaften*) or MAE Providers—incredible amounts of money are blown there—that has in the meantime become a proper industry, a branch of industry you would have to say. And that must be reformed. Most definitely.

Given how many newspaper articles I've read on the welfare reforms, I'm not at all surprised that this informant understands the workfare system as a profitable enterprise. It is precisely the relation to the Job Center that the money saving, i.e. state shrinking, critical discourse would imply: the workfare participant sees himself as part of a process that saves the state money, on

the one hand, and wastes the state's money, on the other hand. The result is that the workfare participant sees his existence within the system as a contradiction that makes no sense. When considered from the point of view of this critical logic, then, the workfare state is nothing that will further his interests or those of society more generally.

Strands of commonality can be found among the curious theories regarding the finances of the workfare state, which were ubiquitous—perhaps most markedly, the point that all of the work falls on the recipient of services at the Job Center.

You have to come well prepared to the Job Center and say, yeah, I read in the internet that there's this and that. Ok I've experienced about two or three exceptions, staffers who were honestly striving (*bemüht waren*), but I only had them for a short time because that's the way it is. Previously, you had one contact person for the entire time. Now it's the team. In other words, you have to at least in part explain the same shit over and over again, because of their constant shuffling—none of it is good. But so you have to go well prepared otherwise nothing will come of it. By now, I've really learned that—and that everything is online: there are social forums and so on with tips and tricks. First, read everything there closely, search out the appropriate paragraphs, and then take that to the Job Center, otherwise—. When they know that this is someone who isn't well informed, then he just as soon hears *this won't work*. Although I also think that they receive directives to delay requests in order to save money. They're all a bunch of interest-earners. So, first denial so that you have to file a complaint in which time nothing happens, in which time the money can work.

Again, this participant conceives of the Job Center as a money saving institution. Particularly interesting here in this account is the manner in which money is thought to work as capital during the time in which neither the workfare participant nor the placement officer at the Job Center is working on account of the deferral. So too, this person echoes the experience of the Job Center as a space in which one's linguistic productions, which always center on the participant's life story, are lost among the shifting personal.

One informant discussed the non-productive nature of his relation to the Job Center as a series of exchanges in which people were doing nothing more than generating the appearance of doing something.

These conversations at the Job Center where one goes and then asks do you have something for me. And the lady looks a bit and says, yeah, so, hmm, yeah, there—ok, I'll print it out for you. Great, then I print a couple of things out—as if for an alibi. I write to them—as if for an alibi—get the rejection, and send proof of this to the Job Center so that I have another 6 months of quiet (*Ruhe*—could also be translated as privacy). And then there's also these—what's it called—this agreement, this Support Agreement (*Fördervereinbarung*) [he means Integration Agreement (*Eingliederungsvereinbarung*)] that you have to sign. Those are definitely to be understood as one-sided [he laughs]. Yeah, that I commit (*verpflichte*) myself to do everything that stands in my power in order to find something—. The Job Center—I also asked to what they commit themselves actually [he laughs harder] and then came nothing. And then came simply absolutely nothing.

This rather straightforwardly practical relationship to the Job Center in which one avails oneself of the Job Center's services not in order to further any career interests but as a way of protecting one's current standard of living, that is, as a way of generating the assurance that one's relationship to the Job Center won't take an accusatory turn—there was much evidence of such a relationship among the workfare participants. Once again, particularly in these contexts where one is generating a defense against any number of legal procedures, there is no evidence of that the workfare participant is orienting his or her behavior on the basis of a career. On the contrary, the more one relates to the Job Center in this way, the less likely it is that there is a normative framework guiding the behavior; it is entirely a rational-strategic approach to work related matters. Consider, too, how this person discusses the problem of vacations, which need to be registered with the Job Center according to *SGB II*.

As for vacations, most people don't go first to the Job Center and file an application for vacation. Instead, they simply assume that it's fine. Up to now there hasn't been any mail why should there be mail from the Job

Center indicating that they want to see me precisely during the two weeks that I find to take a vacation. No one does it. Or you stop by once before, sound the alarms prior so that you know you'll have peace and quiet (*Ruhe*) for the next month. There are a number of things you can do [to keep the Job Center off your back].

Generating alibis in defense of one's current benefit levels, sounding the alarms to guarantee one's peace and privacy in order to take some time off from the otherwise relentless pressure of the workfare state—both indicative of a troubled relationship to the Job Center whereby the Job Center does not exist to further one's professional interests so much as to punish missteps.

Despite diverging justifications and explanations as to why this and why not that, despite diverging relations to the various critical discourses that constitute the culture of neoliberalism, the workfare participants that I spoke with all said in end effect that it's entirely up to you when it comes to interacting with the Job Center. What no one discussed was the construal, then, of the Unemployment Benefits II recipients as customers, which of course would imply that they are going to the Job Center to receive a service. To the extent that they do so, the payment seems to be rendered in self-initiative.

I've made the experience at the Job Center that when I know what I want—now namely a vocational qualification as a travel agent, in that case, they did as much as possible to support me. But I handled all of the prerequisites.

Or similarly:

As quickly became clear, the expectations that one has for the Job Center—I don't know which experiences this is based on—from knowing that it can't be any different—I was like *one doesn't receive any help*. That's of course not entirely correct. When one goes there and says I want work—many people go there and think that they'll get work. That is definitely not the case—because the work simply doesn't exist. If one goes there and says I want Unemployment Benefits I, or to become self-employed, or to be supported with re-training courses or so. You have to tell the people in principle what you want and concretely and perhaps three times. Well, that's the nature of bureaucracy. It does in fact

function. You get help. Of course you get help. You just have to say it, precisely formulate it.

To the extent that the shock of unemployment and the problems of long-term unemployment, most notably a devaluation of one's technical expertise as it becomes outdated, to the extent that these phenomena are destructive of one's sense of agency, one's belief that one can accomplish things today that will enhance one's professional objectives tomorrow, it appears that Berlin's Job Centers do not directly contribute to reestablishing this sense of agency. Rather, workfare participants describe situations in which (1) their individuality is overlooked in the rush to satisfy the minimal formal requirements of the Job Centers' services; (2) their time is devalued for similar reasons; and (3) communication can often undermine the belief that one's voice has any real efficacy. If there is a disciplinary mechanism at work in this context—beyond the external threat of sanctions—then it is the experience that one won't receive anything from the Job Center unless one knows precisely what one wants and has the communicative skills to express that interest repeatedly in a way that might eventually be heard. Curiously, this would seem to reinforce the bifurcation of workfare participants who either do or do not want to. In the case that one does “want to,” that is, in the case that one has professional aspirations, interaction with the Job Center would seem to reinforce how strongly these must be pursued if one is to get the necessary support. For those who don't “want to,” there is no evidence that the Job Center employs any communicative techniques that might ignite or discover and then build on some kernel of motivation—beyond the use of sanctions, which remains an external motivating factor. As we'll see in the following section, there are strict limits to the ability of the Job Center to enforce sanctions insofar as many of the organizations providing workfare positions are reluctant to report possible violations.

## **II. Workfare participants' experience of One-Euro-Jobs**

Theodore Adorno called attention to one of industrial capitalism's most fundamental oppositions in his radio address "Free Time" (*Freizeit*), which originally aired on 25 May 1969: the temporal other of free time is wage labor, "the not not free time...which work fills out—and more precisely, it can be added, the externally determined (*fremdbestimmte*)" (1977, 645). According to E.P. Thompson, it was an awareness of precisely this difference that provided the basis for modern work discipline. "Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted" (1967, 61). As the factory system spread as the primary organizational form of commercial production in the nineteenth century, wage labor likewise became the dominant mode of earning for the majority of the population (Rürup 1992, 61)—and so with it the awareness that one's time did not belong to oneself during the workday when the employer owned and made use of it.

Modern work discipline, then, rested on a certain negative experience of oneself: the awareness that one did not have the right to determine the course of one's actions. Further, it was a function of the commodity relation that one's practice—in the workplace—became rationalized in the sense that it had to become as efficient as possible in order for the employer to make the most of the time that he purchased. Beyond this, though, the factory system itself required particularly rationalized forms of practice from its workers. As Thompson explains, "attention to time in labour depends in large degree upon the need for the synchronization of labour" (1967, 70). That is, as production becomes increasingly divided into specialized spheres in large scale industrial production there is a need to coordinate temporally the labor of these specialists, who were themselves removed in any concrete sense from the labor of other specialists.

Attention to time in labour depends in large degree upon the need for the synchronization of labour. But in so far as manufacturing industry

remained conducted upon a domestic or small workshop scale, without intricate subdivision of processes, the degree of synchronization demanded was slight, and task-orientation was still prevalent... As we get closer to each task, we are surprised to find the multiplicity of subsidiary tasks which the same worker or family group must do in one cottage or workshop. Even in larger workshops men sometimes worked at their own benches or looms, and... could show some flexibility in coming and going. Hence we get the characteristic irregularity of labour patterns before the coming of large-scale machine-powered industry. (Thompson 1967, 70-71)

The specialized labor that must produce as a coherent unity within a vast and variously employed enterprise, then, constitutes the rest of the necessity for the temporal disciplining of the worker in the nineteenth century.

The publication of Daniel Bell's *The Coming of Post-industrial Society* in 1973 was not without controversy. While it appears to me to be as fruitless to rehash the arguments of Bell's harshest critic at the time, Laurence Veysey,<sup>62</sup> as it is to discuss the intricacies of Bell's argument itself, I would like to discuss one important complaint from Richard Gillam, who wrote a commentary on Veysey's critique of Bell that was published alongside it. Gillam argues that the position of "those theorists who perceive an actual or impending end to the industrial way of life," would seemingly also have to make and support the following claim:

that some fundamental alteration in human consciousness both accompanies and confirms the passage to a new age of postindustrial affluence. One imagines a transformation equivalent to the reoriented view of time—from seasonal to a time-clock standard—which scholars such as E.P. Thompson identify with the earlier shift from preindustrial to industrial society. It seems to me that no student of postindustrialism has shown convincingly that such a change occurred. (Gillam 1982, 82)

On the one hand, a fundamental alteration in human consciousness strikes me as an exaggerated prerequisite for declaring the emergence of "a new age." Nevertheless, it seems that work

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<sup>62</sup> See Laurence Veysey (1982).

discipline—specifically as regards the significance of abstract time—has in fact undergone an important transformation. In short, many service sector jobs don't require the same kind of elaborate and predominantly abstract temporal coordination as large scale factories: Taylorism doesn't make as much sense at Walmart as it does at Ford.

Or let us consider the restaurant as an example. Timing is everything in a sense. The cooks must coordinate to produce the multiple parts of a meal and that food must then be delivered quickly by a server who is attentive both to what is coming out of the kitchen and to how it is being consumed in the dining room. While the optimal production and consumption of a meal depends very much on timing, that timing is entirely task oriented—how long it takes to cook or consume this or that part of the meal. But there seems to be more flexibility in the abstract coordination of labor at a restaurant than at a large factory and this is perhaps most apparent in the beginning or ending of a shift. Recall what Sebastian said regarding this issue above. The fact that the servers showed up at 11:00 and didn't really start working until 11:30 wasn't so much a problem in the sense that it undermined the coordinated work of the entire restaurant—orders weren't getting cold as they waited to be delivered. Rather, the executive took this lapse in time discipline as an indicator for something else, namely as a sign of one's lack of commitment to the restaurant. It seems that one's adherence to an abstract work schedule in much of the service sector is primarily important because of what it says about your relation to work more generally.

One function of the MAEs as far as the Job Centers are concerned is definitely to test the willingness of the unemployed. In some cases of long-term unemployment, placement officers would “activate” by proposing an MAE before permitting the person in question to benefit from any other services or educational opportunities whereby the question seemed to be quite simply

whether this person was worth further investment or not, which was always a matter of willingness. But there was an ambiguity regarding whether the placement officers at the Job Centers were merely testing willingness or attempting also to instill the kinds of temporal discipline that emerged in conjunction with the factory system. Comments such as the following came up occasionally in my interviews with workfare participants:

There was somehow this myth—I found it very curious. At each of the two MAEs where I was: yeah, you are unemployed and you surely have difficulty getting up early and coming to work regularly. For me that was nonsense.

As I suggested in Chapter 1, certain media sources tend to structure their stories regarding welfare and workfare with a biographical orientation, i.e. they develop stories about the individual recipients of welfare more than welfare or workfare as a system. In some cases, these stories depict the unemployed as lazy and intractable. A few examples of such headlines caught my eye while I was in the field. “Die 1-Euro-Schnarcher vom Arbeitsamt” (The One-Euro-Snorers from Social Services) in the *Bild*, for example, covered a group of workers who were supposed to be maintaining a public space but instead napped in the shade. The article inspired a reader to photograph a similar sight where he lived and his photos were subsequently published.<sup>63</sup> In “Hartz-IV: Ein Jobvermittler packt aus” (Hartz-IV: A Placement Officer Speaks his Mind), likewise from the *Bild*, a placement officer complained of customers who weren’t interested in any of the jobs he found for them. But I never came across any media sources that told stories about how unemployment undermines the ability of a person to establish and maintain a regular life course marked by consistent transitions between periods of sleeping, eating, and exertion.

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<sup>63</sup> My ethnographic work on the so-called One-Euro-Jobs provided some explanation for how scenes involving workfare participants lounging in the park came about, which I will discuss below.

The conceit that long-term unemployment undermines the rational organization of one's time appears to belong to how long-term unemployment, both in terms of its effects and causes, is understood in the Job Centers. Consider how this placement officer describes the situation of persons who have been unemployed for as long as Germany has been unified.

And what would [employers] want with someone who has been out of the labor market for so long? Often there are foundational skills that they don't have at all. Many, for example, can't work with computers. Or they don't any longer have a daily routine (*Tagesstruktur*). And you see that in their curriculum vitae.

Another placement officer had this to say:

Generally [MAEs] are supposed to integrate the customer back into the first labor market, whereby the point sometimes is simply the stamina (*Durchhaltevermögen*). It's then not so much about building a working relationship and finding an employer who says, Ok, I'll hire him or her with support. The point is that very often such arrangements simply fall apart. In other words, the customer simply doesn't hang in there for the average day, the average work day.

In the second quote, stamina is understood as an effect of basic time discipline and it is believed that this can be practiced or learned on the basis of an MAE.

Drawing on a number of studies involving temporal relations (Gell 1992; Harrison 1982; Harvey 1990; Ribgy 1995), Katherine Pickering argues that "time sense is a product of real material conditions and cannot simply be imposed as an abstract ideological perspective independent of those material constraints" (2004, 96). While Pickering found that persons from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations operate to a large extent on the periphery of wage labor relations, there is a way in which recipients of contingent welfare benefits—and I'm speaking specifically of the Berlin context here but the same likely holds elsewhere—are beholden to material conditions that require abstract forms of time discipline. Recipients of Unemployment Benefits II are in fact subjected again and again to precisely these curious forms of time

discipline. The overburdened bureaucracies—much like the factory system of industrial production—constantly require the unemployed to appear or disappear according to strict abstract coordinates that have nothing to do with anything other than the need to efficiently manage millions of cases. One informant (not a native to Berlin) described an interesting scene when dealing with the German bureaucracy; it may as well have been taken from a Kafka novel.

The people at the Job Center are totally over extended. But that's Berlin as far as I'm concerned. I have learned things in the past years that I'd never experienced before—things that didn't exist for me. "Such as?" I had to go to the tax and revenue office once—as an example, but it holds in general for all agencies. It opens at eight o'clock. There are already 20 people waiting outside. Inside there's a doorman and an old clock—maybe you've seen one, where the numbers turn over. You know, it's not digital; rather, the numbers fall over. At 7:58, there's a seven, a five, and an eight. When it turns 7:59, then the eight flips over and there's a nine. At 7:59, the doorman takes the key to the door. Key goes in. And like the starting signal at the world championship—an eight and a double zero fall. And if you recorded it with a camera—right as the numbers turn, the key turns.

Time here in a sense becomes hollowed out. Despite the line of persons waiting with business to transact, the bureaucracy forces persons on both sides of the counter to pause and wait for the appropriate moment. Time runs the risk of losing its efficacy in the moments before the "right time." Bourdieu argued that "time derives its efficacy from the state of the structure of relations within which it comes into play" (1977, 7). His point was that time itself can be used as part of an agent's strategy in social practice. Thus, "when the unfolding of the action is heavily ritualized, as in the dialectic of offence and vengeance, there is still room for strategies which consist of playing on the time, or rather the *tempo*, of the action, by delaying revenge so as to prolong the threat of revenge" (1977, 7). We might see the above case of waiting in line before an agency opens as a strategy to reduce one's overall time waiting in line, but this strategy only reveals the way in which this time is worthless and quintessentially unproductive. One seeks to

minimize the time spent in such a line so as to maximize one's time on the other side of having fulfilled a bureaucratic obligation.

It's difficult to say exactly how the "myth" emerged that the unemployed have no sense of temporal order or are unable to structure their day rationally, but it appears to be reinforced by the MAEs themselves. Consider how this workfare participant discusses the meaning of the MAE and its focus on punctuality.

Officially, it's always said that MAEs serve to lead us again to normal, regular work. That's what it's supposed to achieve. And it achieves that too in that it says we want to see your signature every morning at 7:30. In other words, people are forced to get up early, to be punctual. "To what extent was that ever a problem?" It wasn't at all. I mean, for me it wasn't a problem. Of course there were a few people who ended up switching out or stopped coming on account of personal problems. But I mean in terms of the level, that was generally people with *Abitur* (grade 13) or people who had studied at a university, in an age range from 25 to 50. At the beginning we were actually highly motivated, because it all sounded really super. But then we quickly realized that it was just administration (*Verwaltung*). I mean, when you permit the question, it would be stupid if you didn't make use of the situation—so in the case of good weather, you hung out. That's the way it is. Of course you tell yourself then—actually, you didn't do anything today but then you also tell yourself—yeah, how can I explain this—*it also wasn't required of us*. So I find that these MAEs are more de-motivating than motivating. That's a waste of tax money in my view. I mean, good, I profit from it insofar as I rake in the 1.50—(laughing) what does "rake in" mean (*abräumen*, literally: to clean up)—I mean you do a little something for it too. But in terms of what's reasonable—there are the wildest projects: going through the streets and noting street signs as part of some empirical investigation, doing something with roof gardens, or making things green—all of it makes sense *somehow*. But also in those cases, there is a bunch of free room for people: they go there and sit for four of the six hours that they're underway at a café or somewhere similar.

Or similarly:

You would—theoretically, theoretically—you would only need to sit down at the beginning of work and stand up at the end of work. In reality, you wouldn't need to do anything. Theoretically. And everyone says, you don't need to do that; if there's anything you don't want to do

just tell us. Theoretically, you could sit around the whole day and read the paper. It's purely activity therapy (*Beschäftigungstherapie*). It's all the same to them. That's the way it is. At some point someone comes up and says do you want to do this or do that.

It were as if time only had a purely formal significance in the context of an MAE. That is, work is reduced to its most elemental formal components—showing up, being present, leaving at the correct time—as those are the factors of “production” that the Job Center emphasizes through its accountability criteria. Particularly interesting in the first account is the criticism that this is a waste of tax money. According to the logic of this criticism, the workfare participant understands his own position in this system as one of unjustified profit. But as soon as he mobilizes this critical logic, he sees how absurd it is; he laughs at the thought of himself raking in money. Nevertheless, he maintains the position despite its absurdity, which would seem to prevent him from understanding the MAE as a context in which he is free to develop and pursue his own interests.

Sebastian had worked in a retirement home for one of his MAEs. He took the residents on walks and played games with them. Because the institution was so financially strapped, he eventually found himself completing basically every task up to handing out medicine. He tells me that one of his colleagues read the newspaper all day. And I heard that point over and over. If there is one activity in particular that the state is supporting on the basis of MAEs, then it is reading the newspaper. Not only is it an activity with which one can busy oneself each day, but it is also a task from which one can gain a sense of accomplishment by completing it. On some level, the state-financed reading of the newspaper would seem to have notable effects: workfare participants are all familiar with and can themselves mobilize the various critiques of the workfare state that one often finds in the newspaper. To get back to Sebastian, though, he doesn't want to sit around and read the newspaper all day because he “sees his grandmother in each of

the persons he is helping in the retirement home.” “The old folks have all worked, they’ve all earned that someone takes care of them a bit—not that they have to wait for an hour to go to the bathroom such that it goes in their pants.” When I asked a placement officer about cases in which the MAE seemed to work well, I got a similar response. “Particularly when working with animals or the elderly,” she told me, “there is an elevation in the sense of self worth (*Selbstwertgefühl*).” An additional placement officer had this to say:

Receiving positive feedback can be very important for the long-term unemployed and you find precisely that with the people who are involved with caring for seniors. My own grandmother is now 88 and she has a very small pension and she also profits (*profitiert*) from this. She isn’t officially classified as someone that requires care but she can hardly make it out of the house. She profits from having one of the One-Euro-Fifty-Workers who comes once a week—a woman—and goes shopping for her. So my grandmother is happy that—in addition to the support from the family—she now has someone that comes regularly and takes care of things and the woman then also receives some positive feedback. *You know, that’s really someone that I can do something for.* Such people—one must honestly say—they are well served in One-Euro-Fifty-Jobs.

It would seem that a fairly intense personal identification with the person or animal served through an MAE is the key both to finding value in one’s work and to re-establishing one’s one sense of personal value. In this regard, it is to some extent puzzling why so much emphasis is placed on aspects of the MAE that build only an abstract or market-oriented value (for example, establishing one’s value as a commodity by establishing on one’s CV that one can show up to work for a period of six months). I asked all of the workfare participants that I spoke with whether or not they discussed things like hobbies with their respective placement officers and the answer was always never. Basically, I was wondering if there was ever any attempt to isolate activities, skills, or competencies in which the workfare participant was personally invested—regardless of any more or less obvious relationship to the labor market. But I never found

evidence of any explicit attempts on the part of the Job Center to uncover possible connections between areas of established interest and investment on the part of the workfare participant other than in the most straightforward questions about prior work experience.

Andrea Muehlebach discusses a very different context in Italy where she did fieldwork on moralized forms of citizenship that have emerged in tandem with the privatization of numerous social services such as care for the elderly. “In short,” Muehlebach tells us, “Italy has seen the rise of a whole range of state-mediated institutions, policies, and pedagogical interventions that attempt to standardize the volunteer as a normative moral subject governed by reliable forms of affect” (2011, 67). Unfortunately, her analysis involves problems typical of the Regulation School and those associated with it (Gramsci 1999; Harvey 1990 and 2005; Peck 2001) which she draws heavily from in situating her project historically. The problem in short is that the role of regulation in determining social and cultural change is often exaggerated at the expense of considering basic economic factors. Here it is helpful to recall some of the premises of William Baumol’s cost disease, which he first formulated in 1967. According to Baumol, many services (particularly health care services) “have indispensable *handicraft attributes*: they require direct contact between those who provide the service and those who consume it” (Baumol 2007, 67). Given that these services are so labor intensive and that this aspect of them won’t change, the costs of their products (i.e. services) will increase exponentially in the long run compared to costs in sectors where investments in labor saving devices and management strategies lead to greater productivity and hence lower relative costs. In other words, the cost of unavoidably labor-intensive services will rise in relation to the costs of products that are constantly produced with greater efficiency—regardless of how these spheres are regulated, which will only slow or hasten these processes. Accordingly, what Muehlebach terms the

“unpaid labor regime” (62) is a sphere that will have great difficulty becoming more productive and hence also won’t attract as much capital investment (given lower expectations for return). The need to find other ways to provide labor in this sphere outside of traditional wage labor will be necessary to the extent that we hope to continue benefiting from these services. In this regard, her critique of Italy’s solution to the problem strikes me as somewhat shortsighted. For, she doesn’t critique the fact that these services has been privatized (and hence subjected entirely to the dynamic Baumol has warned of since the late 1960s). Rather, she grounds her critique largely in terms of rights, arguing that “[private emotions] produce a public that is particular rather than universalistic, voluntaristic rather than structured around legally guaranteed rights” (75).

In most cases, to return to my argument, the workfare participants I spoke with experienced the time of the MAE as empty of any personal investment, a mere formal requirement in order to subsidize one’s income. Consider how this person responded to my question as to how the current workfare state differed from the previous welfare state (he had had experiences with both systems).

I have to say, absolutely nothing has changed. The only thing that did was these MAEs, which however don’t bring anything professionally, although they have the benefit that one can earn a bit more in addition. Because this Social Aid or Unemployment Benefits II—that doesn’t begin to cover expenses. I know of course dozens of friends and acquaintances that are also unemployed and when I always hear in the press about slackers or so—there isn’t anyone who would *not* want to have a One-Euro-Fifty-Measure. Simply because that’s 150 to 180 Euros a month more. You work for six hours. I have—since Unemployment Benefits II and these MAEs existed—I’ve always immediately tried to get another one after the other, as soon as one measure was over. And it’s actually worked out well up to now. And I have to say, those were activities where I had the impression: somebody was clowning around when he thought of this (he laughs), some administrator: ach, we’ll do a book drive, collect book donations. Otherwise it was sold to us as—yeah, as if—self-initiative (*Eigeninitiativ*). But ultimately, mornings the signature that you’re there, afternoons the signature that you’re there, otherwise we did what we wanted. So there was absolutely nothing, no

support (*Förderung*), no challenge (*Forderung*), nothing. And by now this qualification component that's always part of it—I've already been through all of it. I have a fork-lift license (he laughs); I've been through the computer programs; I was even able to get my driver's license. But nothing's come of it professionally. That eventually a recommendation would come from the Job Center that I should introduce myself somewhere—zero. Zero. So it's all more or less a matter of self-initiative.

A number of people that I spoke with called attention to the fact that the term “One-Euro-Job” is a misleading title insofar as all of these positions in Berlin paid 1.50 Euros at the time I was conducting research—hence the renaming to “One-Euro-Fifty-Job” or something similar. While this can and should be read as a form of resistance to the legitimate discourse that symbolically undermines the value of workfare positions by calling attention to their most immediate, most direct value, the workfare participants have maintained the logic of the critical rationality imposed on them by simply making the correction to One-Euro-Fifty. For, the name change doesn't alter the way in which the previous name critiqued the workfare state for undermining the value of regular labor and hence also the nation more generally. A second noteworthy aspect of this informant's characterization of Germany's new workfare state is the two uses of self-initiative. In the first case, he indicates that the MAE is “sold” as a matter of self-initiative, which he doesn't find convincing precisely because he can't see them as the production of someone who has taken any initiative himself. Rather, he views their invention as an outcome of goofing around and it is because no one on the administrative side is showing any initiative that he acknowledges the importance of self-initiative—as if to say, no one is interested in helping me so I have to help myself. Interestingly, this form of self-initiative doesn't emerge in relation to a “desirous” other but, rather, in relation to an other that is merely joking around.

Again and again, workfare participants explained to me that the sole reason for their participation in the program was to increase their income. When I asked someone from the over-25 crowd why they sought out or accepted an MAE, I always got an answer similar to this:

How can I explain it—there is basically no—I don’t believe that any unemployed person applies for an MAE because he hopes somehow to be taken on by this or that organization on the basis of it. So I would say that the only motivation for me—and in my circle of friends and acquaintances—is simply to gain additional income through it.

Or again:

It’s simply an opportunity to earn more money. The 180 Euro that you get is extremely important. Even if it was for work that wasn’t interesting—you can suffer through it for half a year.

This second quote underlines the way in which there is virtually no connection to the activity other than the monetary one: the professional activity has no value in and of itself; it is only *useful* for achieving an end, namely maintaining the semblance of a previously established standard of living. Accordingly, the workfare participants become caught in a traditional relation to their work precisely as Weber outlined, whereby making more money on the basis of a more intense working hour is not as appealing as working less in order to maintain the established living standard. Consider this workfare participant’s experiences as an intern (coordinated through an Activity Agency and hence also the Job Center on the basis of an MAE) at a large supermarket chain.

For this MAE, I could seek out an internship and then work at the place like normal. But that was a bad experience. I was more or less, it appeared to me that I was slave—that was at Rewe at the cash register. And that was back-breaking work (*Knochenarbeit*), back-breaking work without end. “How exactly does an internship at Rewe work?” You receive—you have—can six hours a—must be there each day and there’s the possibility if you’re good that they’ll hire you. Ok, in theory that all sounds wonderful. Then you go there, apply, talk further with the area manager. She says ok, you start on Monday, and you start. “And then

you stand there as a normal employee?” Yeah, you’re treated very much like a normal employee. Normally, you have 5 minutes every hour so that you can go to the restroom or so when you’re sitting at the cash register. It was partially the case, though, that I would be at the cash register five or six hours and just work through and there wasn’t anyone that could take over for me because everyone had something to do. That’s the good thing [about MAEs], you get a look into other professional worlds. I have great respect for cashiers; now I know what all they do. Because it’s not just checking people out. You have to keep the checkout counter clean, fill the shelves, clean up the cardboard—and that’s serious stress. In my opinion, that must really be people that are a bit desperate who do that work. “How so?” Yeah, first, it’s poorly paid, all kinds of unpaid overtime. I even saw that with the branch manager. After the store was closed, she would work another four or five hours so that the work would half way get done. I personally don’t have to have that. I’d rather be unemployed and try some other way around to get there. But that was brutal.

Note the correction from “you get [time]”—as if this is an opportunity—to “you must be present”—as if this is slave labor as he previously said. Of course there can be no doubt that the working conditions at the cash register are in fact difficult. In Germany (and Europe more generally), supermarkets and department stores have shorter hours than in the United States.<sup>64</sup> Retail stores in Germany are, for example, only allowed to open on the weekend if they are located in transportation hub like a train station. One fairly obvious consequence of this is that the working time of supermarket employees in particular (because of the high turnover of product) becomes more intense. So there is very much a “real” basis for the difficult working conditions that this workfare participant describes. Nevertheless, he interprets those conditions as indicative of his lack of freedom rather than as challenges on the path that he laid out for himself for his professional development. And that is precisely where one sees the effects of the critical discourse that he resituates himself in when he switches from “receive” to “have” to “must.”

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<sup>64</sup> According to the McKinsey Global Institute, food stores are open an average of 130 hours per week in the United States, 72 hours in France, and just 65 hours in Germany (quoted in Glyn et al. 2007, 142-143).

But the time pressure that dominates at large supermarkets differs sharply from more typical MAEs in Berlin where there is so little time pressure that the passing of time itself becomes one's main preoccupation.<sup>65</sup>

The MAE proceeded like this: first, you applied. Then it was said Ok, we're going to collect book donations.<sup>66</sup> There were 17 to 20 people in the group. Then it was established—what should be done, who would like to do what. There were people that would acquire, then people that would pick up the donations, then people who sorted the books, then people who got things going—for example, at a church—so that the books could be distributed. Always 4 to 5 people in a group. Yeah, and then they basically just let us work (*machen lassen*). That is, mornings we would—so that was, I can still remember, that was a really nice summer. Mornings we would arrive at 7:30, sign in, say that we were going to pick up books, sat around in a park first for a few hours, enjoyed the sun, then we picked up the books, delivered the books, and then said that we were going to look and see if we could find more, then we went somewhere in the sun for another two to three hours and that was that. That's the way it went all summer. “What sorts of feelings do you associate with that?” Well now, in regard to proper value, I would say there was none. That was neither productive nor anything else. That was basically—ok, pass the time so that you make your hours (*Stunden schafft*) so that at the end you get your 180 Euros.

“Was there any time pressure?” None, on the contrary. With these MAEs, I regularly have the impression that me and my co-sufferers (*Leidensgenosse*) more or less—the work creation measures are actually for the people who work in administration. Obviously. Because they wouldn't exist without us. But when you're told that you have to show up (*antanzten*), provide your signature—I mean, seriously—and afternoons you have to once again give your Friedrich Wilhelm by three or four o'clock but otherwise you can actually *do whatever you want*. Of course we made sure that we were successful. We collected a bunch of books, it's not as if we didn't do anything. You have to produce a bit of something. And we were pretty successful in that regard but we

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<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that the internship at Rewe was an exception to how most of the MAEs operate and that there are limits to how long such internships can last. As the Federal Employment Agency's *Manual for Working Opportunities* indicates, “Internships with employers generally do not fulfill the legal criteria for AGH MAE (in public interest, supplemental). They nevertheless raise the chances of integration in the general labor market. Following in part the realization of parts of measures at employers according to *SGB II*, paragraph 16, section 1 in comparison to *SGB III*, paragraph 46, internships on the basis of an MAE with one or more employers are permitted for a total period of up to four weeks” (Budesagentur für Arbeit 2009, 7).

<sup>66</sup> I happened to interview two different workfare participants in two different parts of Berlin (east and west in fact) whose MAEs consisted of book drives.

nevertheless tried to create a bit of free space for ourselves in that time. Yeah, as I say, that was basically an administrative matter. Then they always pushed that we actually do the qualification portion because we weren't there during that time but instead at another school or wherever and then they were rid of us for that time. And then I have to add that job application training is always a basic requirement at such an MAE. By now I've done five job app—actually six or seven—job application trainings. And the one instructor says that's a super application, it can't be better. The next says what kind of nonsense is that, you need to organize it much differently. And the third says that what the second said was complete nonsense, do it like this. In my opinion, that's all money—if we speak now of a reasonable use of finances—I myself cost 1.50 an hour and that makes 180 Euro. The responsible agency receives 550 Euro for me, for my administration. If you would take this money—550 Euro—and would say hello Travel Agency E—, wouldn't you like to hire him; you get 550 Euro from us. That would really be a reasonable use of money. Everything else is an excuse. That changes the unemployment statistics. I've never heard of a case among my acquaintances where somebody had an MAE and on the basis of that MAE came into work. Nothing.

Here, too, the critical discourse slips into the conversation. Unlike the workfare participant who framed his experience as forced labor, here wages are seen as a waste of money insofar as they support the agency without actually altering the employment status of the workfare participant.

In such a context, killing time becomes a task in itself.

There's an attendance requirement, we couldn't leave so we messed around on the computer for six hours or surfed the internet like idiots. Officially, we were supposed to be looking for jobs. Sure, you do that for two or three days and then you've seen everything and then you start at some point doing something else. That's really how it was—right at three o'clock you could go but what you did during that time—what no one supervised (*kontrolliert*), for which no one was interested—that was off-putting, that was arduous. “Arduous to kill time?” Yeah, precisely. That's deadly. There's nothing worse than waiting six hours for quitting time (we both laugh). *And nothing happens*. There's nothing worse. “Was that the most difficult aspect of the MAE?” Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. It makes you aggressive after awhile. Because it's so pointless. Even with the silly MAEs with green spaces or handicapped people or whatever—in those cases, there's still a little meaning there but when you're hanging in front of a screen or just sitting at the comp—or

even reading a book or whatever—you can't even concentrate because you're sitting there with 20 other people in a room. Uh—that's totally pointless.

If one begins from the critical understanding of MAEs and workfare as forced labor, it's difficult to account for the empty time that workfare participants described to me. It could of course be argued—and with right—that the legal framework of Hartz IV renders it rather difficult to achieve anything that might satisfy common standards of productivity on the basis of an MAE. For, Hartz IV was intended to guarantee the first labor market from being undermined by state subsidized labor even as it “challenged and supported” the long-term unemployed by introducing workfare programs. Legally, the MAEs were to be “supplemental” to any work bought or sold in the first labor market. On the one hand, then, it doesn't seem all too surprising that killing time became a problem at many MAEs given that they were not allowed to perform any otherwise necessary work. On the other hand, though, the question remains as to why this time becomes appropriated in many cases as leisure time, as time free of pressures that wouldn't appear to exist in the MAE unless they are more generally perceived as externally imposed activity that benefits someone else. The critical rationalities developed in response to the Hartz reforms, though, would support just that understanding of the MAE and its accompanying relation to time.

At this point, I would like to turn to how various NGOs' appropriation of the critical discourses might also play into the broader cultural configuration whose general contours seem to be given by the critical discourse. Consider how this administrator of a large NGO in Berlin discusses the new workfare measures.

We did not become an activity agency (*Beschäftigungsträger*)—that was very consciously decided. Others have 100, 200, 500 MAE positions; we intentionally don't do that and this has for us a political justification [this particular NGO had no less than 50 workfare participants involved in

their operations during the time in which I conducted my fieldwork]. First, we consider certain working conditions (*Arbeitsverhältnisse*) such as MAEs as problematic and also as politically problematic. That has everything to do with the force to work (*Zwang zur Arbeit*) that exists since the transition of these positions to *SGB II* [he's referring to the way in which publicly funded working opportunities became connected to conditional welfare benefits]—we reject that and we don't make it a reality. Rather, when people work here, they do that on their own volition (*freiwillig*). In every interview, we discuss this theme explicitly and say it won't harm you if you indicate that you would not like to work here for whatever reason under this and that condition. We always report to the Job Center that we don't have any possible positions of assignment in this case. In other words, it won't harm them—which has changed in our, also my work. Earlier when these positions were financed according to *SGB III* and were, accordingly, fundamentally a matter of free will, the point of departure was different for people. It has become more apparent that the pressure has increased to be forced to accept many similar and also these employment relations—not necessarily for financial reasons. But also because the Job Center can stand behind it and cause extraordinary pressure. And that's entirely a negative effect. As concerns our motive, we fundamentally don't force people to work and certainly not under these conditions.

The activity is not particularly challenging. And that isn't apparently the pretense of the Job Center. They often speak of activation, that is, simply testing whether or not someone can still work, integrate themselves in such a context, can he or she get up at 8am or similar things with minimal qualification components. Most only last six months. So in terms of the instrument, there's not much to expect, I imagine. In practice, there seem to be relatively few—but in individual cases good things are accomplished for the people, also for us, through engaged work. And it gives many a direction such that afterwards they know, yeah, that's an area in which I would potentially like to work further. *Fundamentally, I don't see that though.* When I consider it—I am also familiar with many other agencies—I know what's going on in many places in the city and I find it to be a holding pattern, sometimes a disciplinary mechanism, and very seldom does it make any sense. On the contrary, there are by now many activity careers in Berlin—people who go from one activity to the next without any perspective and without any prospects for development. And in those cases, I believe it to be more of a disqualification-instrument. The practice in the Job Centers, at least in this area of Berlin, indicates that the MAE is an effective, relatively inexpensive way to bring people into some kind of activity. It depends on the placement officer, but many ask in which direction the participant

would like to go, what their interests are, how they want to further develop themselves. Others direct participants to an activity simply to get them away from their desk—which is perhaps also understandable if you consider the working situation in the Job Centers.

My point here is not to point blame or otherwise undermine the position explained here. But it is essential to understand how thoroughly the critical discourse ultimately determines the administration of the MAEs. What's particularly interesting is the focus on the question of motivation, whether from the workfare participant himself or from the state. The NGO—as a starting point—weeds out those who aren't willing and so tends to isolate precisely that portion of the unemployed whom the workfare state intends to target. This is a far more widespread practice than the newspaper would lead us to believe. Consider what this NGO administrator from a different municipality in Berlin had to say about the MAEs.

It's pretty much the case that we financially support the organization with the help of MAEs. And it makes sense how this came about. The organization looked where it could make some money to support its people.

Twice as many people are sent to us as we actually take. Hence the need for interviews. There we ask people what they can do. We developed the concept before, there's assignment positions—best case scenario in these workshops. Can you work with kids, more handwork, or something with bikes—so, we ask them what they can do and we tell them what we have. But before anything we ask if they're up for something (*ob sie Bock haben*) or if it's a compulsory measure (*Zwangsmassnahme*) for them. There are many people that don't want to. So—we have one here who was forced and the others are all, they very much wanted to have something. There was no way around it. At any rate, we ask what they can do, whether they have any desire (*ob sie Lust haben*), and then we tell them what we can offer. And that's how they make it into one of the divisions. In terms of every day matters, we organize things like this: every two weeks we have a large meeting where everyone comes together and each group reports on what it's doing and that's also where the tasks are divided. We have a research group, too, that researches where there's stuff for free or cheap. They give a report at the big meeting, but then we also have weekly team meetings, which are organized around the different divisions. There we try to develop work

assignments in cooperation with the people that they themselves find meaningful. That's actually our goal, which is also why we take this laborious path. Some find this to be difficult that we don't have this ready-made work where we can say today you're going to do this and this and this and the six hours will then be filled. Rather, we actually go to this team meeting and ask what's going on here. We want to develop an ecological space here but don't know how exactly—How can we go about that? What can we do, what do you want to do? And something develops out of that. In some divisions there's not as much play room in which case the people come together and discuss how to organize opening times or perhaps the possibility of developing some kind of creative product at some point, which could eventually be sold. I believe that the organization—as far as the work that the organization does is concerned—it doesn't really have anything to do with MAEs. Rather—as it has come to work—we take a look at what we could possibly do when we're writing a proposal for an MAE. And we invent work, quasi, that is for the common good, you know, and that can proceed on the basis of an MAE.

First, this administrator touches on the difficult financial situation of numerous NGOs, which has increasingly implicated them in the workfare state as they become more dependent on it for financial support. This is of course not to say that these NGOs are profiting handsomely from administering workfare positions. The last quoted administrator was himself unemployed and had himself held an MAE before being hired to his current administrative position. I came across this situation quite frequently in which NGOs were being run by the formerly unemployed and my point is simply that the administrative positions at the NGOs in question here are not highly paid or highly sought after.

Beyond any doubt, though, many NGOs in Berlin that are offering MAEs cannot be criticized for their straightforward implementation of state policies. Similar to the findings of recent work on the anthropology of NGOs, these institutions must be seen as complicated and often paradoxical sites of the “dynamics of hope alongside those of despair” (Mertz and Timmer 2010, 175). Nevertheless, my findings depart sharply from some of these investigations.

Christian Vannier, for example, finds that “audit processes encourage self-responsible individuals or groups to identify with the goals of neoliberal governmentality: increased market fitness through efficiency, and self-improvement” (2010, 284). The point is that making persons accountable to certain criteria implies that they will internalize the values implicit in the criteria and conduct themselves further in ways amenable to the neoliberal state and market. The heightened focus on punctuality and presence at MAEs in Berlin seemed to support other factors in hollowing them out in a sense or in suspending the efficacy of time such that working at an MAE was no different than standing in line in front of this or that government agency. One complied with the criteria but only insofar as that was the prerequisite for obtaining one’s additional financial support. In other words, workfare participants seemed to recognize the fact that NGOs were interested in figuring out whether or not they were willing participants:

It went relatively quickly although I was there twice, had two interviews, which is basically illegal on the part of the agency. They aren’t allowed to choose but they do it regardless. They really wanted to see how engaged I am and whether I would come to the second meeting again on time.

That NGOs or Job Centers can test whether or not one is engaged, that they have a sophisticated apparatus for isolating the willing from the unwilling, though, is still quite different than commanding an apparatus that has the potential to subjectivize in the sense of creating motivation that might extend beyond the threat of sanction or the promise of additional income.

### **III. Conclusion: One-Euro-Jobs and the absence of future**

The NGO administrator quoted above indicated his concern that numerous workfare participants were going from MAE to MAE without any real perspective that would link the workfare activity to an improved labor situation in the future. Numerous workfare participants echoed this concern themselves:

What should I say—that was an activity (*Beschäftigung*). It had meaning, but it was an activity. In reality, you don't actually make it out of the MAE into proper work.

Or again:

One knows how the chances are and what one is offered is really—in 1983 I earned 2500 Deutsch Mark. If I would start somewhere now, I would—if I am really lucky—start at 1300 [Euro per month] and then taxes and so on. So you'd have a bit more money, that's it. And you of course also can't accept that you work like crazy. Social Assistance as it currently exists is basically a spider web: it holds you at a particular level and the chance that you might be able to get out of it at some point isn't even there. Of course there are many who become resigned, who take to the bottle and sit in the park. Schnapps is cheap and TV is for free. And that was it already. But I'm of the opinion that that couldn't have been everything—I'm still too young for that.

The second person begins by implying that the intensity with which he would have to work were he to accept a job on the general labor market does not befit the wages for such work given his previous work experiences. This is basically an honest and fair assessment of the situation based on objective criteria. Interesting, though, is that he immediately posits the workfare state (Social Assistance as it currently exists) as the restricting force that is holding him in place and limiting his chances for improving his situation in the future. While I want to underline that I don't take the critical discourse surrounding welfare reform in Germany to be constitutive of the larger social context here, it does supply a framework for understanding that context that does not permit perspective on the future on the basis of a present situated in workfare. Whatever empowerment the workfare participant experiences by denouncing the workfare state comes at the cost of his or her relation to the future.

Wir packen unsere Luftschlangen aus  
und werfen sie in die Luft  
Alle packen ihre Luftschlangen aus  
und werfen sie in die Luft denn das sind  
Hip Hop Clowns und Party Rapper  
Hip Hop Clowns und Party Rapper  
Hip Hop Clowns und Party Rapper  
Hip Hop Clowns und Party Rapper

(We break out our streamers  
and throw them in the air  
Everyone breaks out their steamers  
and throws them in the air because these are  
hip hop clowns and party rappers...)

-Fünf Sterne Deluxe, "Hip Hop Clowns and Party Rappers"

5.

## Professional Deadbeats: Hip Hop and the Question of Productivity

### Introduction: "In a few minutes we arrive in blahblahblah"

It's a curious tour that Levent Soysal takes us on through "Berlin's ethnographic present," where "we walk the grounds of a real 'living history' display, and (en)counter, and reckon, history on everyday routes and at tourist stops." "Just outside the subway station in Wittenberg Platz," for example, "and opposite the mega-store of high consumption KaDeWe (Kaufhaus des Westens), stands a signpost directing the passer-by to the infamous concentration camps." And at Potsdamer Platz "the tourist buses stop on their way to (or back from) Unter den Linden in the east, center of high culture (operas, symphony halls, museums) and high shopping ('living museums' of consumption)" (Soysal 2001, 6). What makes this tour curious isn't that it juxtaposes history's remnants with today's merchandise or even unspeakable atrocity with common tourism. It's curious—three times over—because it so adamantly insists on associating Berlin with the unlikely adjective "high."

Alternative portrayals of Berlin have proliferated since the late 90s among the city's hip hop artists who have made "cruelty of rhymes a Berlin trademark" as Thomas Groß describes the trend (*Zeit*, 18 August 2005).<sup>67</sup> Sido, for example, has this to say as he likewise takes listeners on a tour in a track titled "Steig ein" (Get in): "Du sitzt lieber an 'nem gutgedeckten Tisch? Dann merkst du schnell Berlin ist nichts für dich" (You prefer to sit at a well-set table? Then you'll quickly notice that Berlin is nothing for you). Sido has worked with both of the Berlin record labels that defined the rap style now commonly identified with Berlin. Marcus Staiger founded Royal Bunker in 1998 and ran it until he produced its last album in 2008 (K.I.Z.'s *Sexismus gegen Rechts*). The label developed out of a weekly open mike session in a basement club and released its first major album in 2001.<sup>68</sup> Although there had been other artists to rap in the battle style (most notably Iz and Tone on their single "Ich diss dich"),<sup>69</sup> Royal Bunker supported an emerging battle rap *scene*, which continues to influence the work of numerous Berlin artists (Kool Savas, B-Tight, Sido, and K.I.Z, to name the most famous). Aggro Berlin, founded in 2001, pushed the lyrical aggression central to the battle rap scene yet further and was consequently criticized for perpetuating homophobic, racist, and otherwise dangerous lyrics. Both labels, though, were home to artists known for their crass portrayals of poverty and depravity.

Sido, however, does not draw his inspiration solely from the early battle rap scene in Berlin, itself modeled on the Los Angeles hip hop workshop Project Blowed. His lyrics also engage tropes from rap that critics associate with Hamburg—if they tie it to a geographic

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<sup>67</sup> In his reception of Berlin rap, Groß ends up reproducing the entire set of associations that I will address below: "Now it's all about making yourself out to be as hard as the conditions—not in order to break them but in order to profit from them." In other words, he expects revolutionary music and is disappointed to find bare commercialism.

<sup>68</sup> MOR, *NLP* (Berlin: Royal Bunker, 2001). For an overview of this period in Berlin hiphop and the rise of Royal Bunker in particular, see the documentary *Gegen die Kultur* (Cologne: Groove Attack, 2008).

<sup>69</sup> Konkret Finn, *Ich diss dich* (Frankfurt a.M: No Mercy Records, 1994).

location at all. And while there's definitely something to that association, the artists in question just as often themselves allude to No man's Land as they do to their home city. Why do concrete geographical locations not function in these lyrics as they seem to in so much other hip hop? If we base our answer on what's written in the newspaper, then we would say that these are rappers attempting to establish the largest audience possible for their work so as to receive the greatest possible profit from it. One might also add that these are rappers of the middle class and, therefore, they could always see beyond the immediate geographic confines of their upbringing (which is precisely the opposite of what one might assume of life in a ghetto). And there's something to that assumption: "Hallo Deutschlands Mittelschicht/ ich tue das hier nur für dich" (Hello Germany's middleclass / I do this here just for you).<sup>70</sup> In what follows, though, I will develop an alternative standpoint from which to speak about hip hop in and around Germany, which doesn't mobilize the otherwise central opposition between artistic production and commercialism.

In the first section of this chapter, I readdress the "origin" of hip hop in order to confront the contradiction that has made the origin good to think if not thinkable in general. I will also confront there the historical moment in which the social unity of hip hop—the immediate ties between producers and consumers—is shattered, rendering hip hop susceptible to the political projects of groups external to its context of production. In the second section, I consider the critical reception of hip hop in Germany and show that it became implicated, quite nearly on arrival, in an assemblage of ideological state apparatuses. In the final section, I chart the emergence of the professional *Versager* (deadbeat), a social position that the critical reception of hip hop in Germany—particularly insofar as it reinserted a cultural hierarchy among products of high and low culture—made discursively possible.

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<sup>70</sup> Fiva, "Profi," *Rotwild* (Munich: Kopfhörer Recordings, 2009).

## I. It's all about "you": the question of the audience in hip hop

At the origin of hip hop lies a contradiction: it appears to be both commercially and politically motivated practice. No one is more authorized to discuss hip hop's origin than the legendary hip hop journalist Nelson George who has written on the scene since the days of wayback. Here is how he frames hip hop's originary motives:

Money was not a goal. None of the three original DJs—Herc, Flash, Bambaataa—expected anything from the music but local fame, respect in the neighborhood, and the modest fees from the parties given at uptown clubs or the odd midtown ballroom... Hip hop was not a mass market concept. It was not a career move. (1998, 20-21)

George's point, in more or less his own words, is to distance the origin of hip hop from its malformation in gangsta rap, whose commercial character derived from the crack explosion that spread materialism like a virus and thereby subverted the moral integrity of the soul generation.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, the "origin" of hip hop—at least in this privileged account—is premised on the difference between altruism (along with its associated communal politics) and the rise of materialism. It is, in other words, by virtue of the transformation of hip hop's *raison d'être* that we can recognize its origin as such. But, as I'm arguing, even at this origin constructed by separating it from its own other, the contradiction remains. Money was not a goal, it is said, yet Herc anticipated modest fees. Hip hop was not a career move, yet Herc—a regular DJ at various clubs in the Bronx—expected to achieve local fame. Obviously, developing new techniques for mixing dance music, not to mention developing a reputation for himself on this basis, which might increase the size of his audience at the clubs, stood in Herc's professional interests. George's position—and that of critics who prefer to imagine a harmonious social unity at the birth of hip hop on the basis of which later artists and trends can be judged—is contradictory.

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<sup>71</sup> Eithne Quinn offers what I find to be the most convincing discussion of the commercial influences on gangsta rap; see (2005, chap. 1 *passim*).

“And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire” (Derrida 1978, 279). My point here will not be to evaluate this desire, much less to justify or criticize it. Rather, I will simply show how this desire can obscure and render illegitimate a second political project that is more interesting than it appears in the shadow of the privileged political project of hip hop.

Perhaps something occurred in the history of hip hop that would require us to acknowledge divergent interests and projects. If so, it might as well have happened at Harlem World on 30 December 1981 in an epic battle between the party MC Chief Rocker Busy Bee and the lyrical MC Kool Moe Dee. In order to grasp what could have been at stake at an event that signals the death of one form of rap and the birth of another, a question must be posed concerning what it means to rock the party. J. L. Austin’s articulation of the difference between the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions of speech can help us answer it.<sup>72</sup> In short, these three terms respectively relate to saying something, doing something, and having a particular effect on an audience. One of the interesting things about the party MC is the way in which all of these dimensions converged in an immediately present meaning during a performance—and let us preliminarily define “rocking the party” as performing in a way that integrates Austin’s three dimensions of speech more or less seamlessly. Such a felicitous occurrence, as I will argue, must remain fundamentally in the past at a point prior to the rise of the lyrical MC.

The party MC performed before a live audience and, at the performance in question here, a number of MCs competed in a contest. The Force MCs, Johnny Wa, Busy Bee, and Kool Moe

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<sup>72</sup> Invoking Austin in a discussion of hip hop is unlikely and problematic given that he linked more explicit and literal forms of communication to higher levels of society and favored “serious,” “normal” speech over parasitic usage. As he explains, “a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage... Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use... All this we are *excluding* from consideration.” (1965, 22). Much of the MC’s speech is, obviously, not straightforward, serious, or normal when considered in relation to standard English. Nevertheless, I have a hard time finding any of it socially regressive. In fact, it seems all the more interesting the less straightforward and expected it is.

Dee all appear on the recording of the Harlem World battle that I listened to at the Rare and Manuscripts Collection at Cornell University. I mention this not only for bibliographic accuracy but also to note the circumstances in which someone of my generation (born in 1980) must access this performance, which is unquestionably one of the most famous bootlegs in hip hop history. Interestingly, if you search for this recording on Youtube, you will likely find numerous recordings of Kool Moe Dee's performance but none of the other performers—a point to which I will return below. At any rate, the performance was a contest in which the competitors were not expected to address each other but, rather, the crowd in the typical style of the party MC, for whom call and response was a key technique of soliciting and encouraging audience participation and enthusiasm.

One of the problems of course with analyzing the significance of the party MC's performance is that there are generally very few recordings on which to base one's analysis. For the purposes of my argument, I will consider one of the first hit records in hip hop history, the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" from 1979. I could perhaps make similar points in reference to the recording of Busy Bee's live performance on 30 December 1981 but "Rapper's Delight" is lyrically more complex and hence is easier to submit to extended analysis. Further, there are ways in which "Rapper's Delight" reveals the structure of party rap more efficiently than Busy Bee does in his famous live performance. Without further ado:

I said a hip hop the hippie the hippie  
to the hip hip hop an' you don't stop  
the rock it to the bang bang boogie  
say up jumped the boogie  
to the rhythm of the boogie the beat  
now what you hear is not a test I'm rappin' to the beat  
and me the groove and my friends are gonna try to move your feet

"I said" is an odd formulation to begin a song with. But it's ingenious in that it implicates the listener from the beginning in a communicative event that is "now" (as soon as the song begins)

occurring: it's as if the MC is rapping in response to a request from the audience/listener to repeat something already said. The "a" that follows is wildly complicated for a single letter. In black vernacular, it is common to place "a" before a verb to construct the immediate future tense, as in *I'm a-sing you a song*, which is to say *I'm going to sing you a song*. Obviously, "a" is also used as an article before nouns. Here it is impossible to decide whether we are dealing with a verb or a noun such that both of the following interpretations are possible: "I said, gonna hip-hop" or "I said, a *hip* hop—not a tired or outmoded hop."

The second and third lines involve a second slip between a noun and a verb: you don't stop the *rock* / *rock* it to the bang bang boogie. What's interesting is that there is a seamless transition between the MC describing the event as it occurs (you don't stop the rock) and his command for the audience/listener to participate in that event (rock it to the bang bang boogie). In other words, the descriptive side of this line, firmly grounded in Austin's category of the locutionary, is inextricably linked to an action, which the audience is to perform in response to the MC's imperative. So the truth of what the MC says about the event (whether the audience/listener has stopped rocking or not) is dependent on the audience/listener following the command but it also cannot be separated from the command itself. Further, when the MC says that he, the groove, and his friends are going to try to move the audience/listener's feet, he states explicitly the effect that his rap is to have, which is to say that he directly expresses the perlocutionary dimension of the entire song. But that effect has already occurred if the audience/listener responds to his imperative, which, as said, cannot be separated from the MC's description of the event.

The three dimensions of speech that Austin discusses (saying something, doing something, and having an effect on the audience) can all be fully expressed and more or less

immediately achieved in the party MC's performance. In one way or another, the party MC is generally commenting on some aspect of the event that is unfolding (that includes of course when he's talking about himself). And he delivers this commentary in a way that always does something, namely move his audience. So too, the effect that he is supposed to have on his audience (move them) is identical to what his commentary does. When all goes well, then, there is an indistinguishable union among what the MC says, what he does in saying it, and what effect it has on its audience. The truth of his commentary and the happiness of his performance involve an inextricable link between him speaking and his audience dancing. And that's what it means to rock the party. Or so I figure—I don't really know, I just have the bootleg. Returning to the legendary battle in question, the competitors were expected to engage the audience directly in the style of the party MC, if for no other reason than because the audience decided the outcome of the contest. Further, the audience's judgment was based on their level of participation in the performance, that is, as an answer to the question *who rocked me most*—and this point will forever confound us latecomers. The entire meaning, force, and effect of hip hop in the days of way back was bound up inextricably in the bodies that made up the audience and *only on the basis of the authority of those bodies could a judgment on the value of a given performance be made*. It is not surprising, then, that what sets Busy Bee apart from the other mentioned MCs is the extent to which his performance consisted of call and response, that is, a direct communication with the audience.<sup>73</sup>

The audience's estimation of Busy Bee could have been an obstacle for Kool Moe Dee had he rapped in the style of the party MC; he would have had to do everything that Busy Bee

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<sup>73</sup> There is of course in call and response a temporal disjuncture between the MC's call and the audience's response, which departs from the more immediate connection between the MC's rapping and the audience's dancing. What call and response ends up achieving, though, is a structural union between the MC and audience that courses through the entire performance.

did except markedly better. Instead, he used the situation—the fact that Busy Bee had already rocked the party—to his advantage. As soon as he gets on stage, Kool Moe Dee begins calling the skills of Busy Bee into question. “We gonna get a little something straight here in the place to be. How many people think Busy Bee Starski rocked the house? [loud cheering] I hear that in the place to be... I’ll give it to the man, he know how to rock the crowd. But when it comes to having rhymes—no way he can fuck around.”<sup>74</sup> The logic behind this parasitic move is clear: by calling the skills of Busy Bee into question, Kool Moe Dee implies that he is a more capable MC such that Busy Bee’s notoriety is symbolically transferred to him. The matter becomes all the more complicated, however, when Moe Dee begins to rap, for he speaks as if to Busy Bee, which fundamentally alters the significance of “you” along with inaugurating a shift in audience design.

come on brother man don't you say nothin'  
I'm not finished yet I gotta tell you somethin'  
too hot to trot I'm here to rock the spot  
I'm gonna rock your ass whether you like it or not  
ya made up the title right on the spot  
how can I take a title you ain't got  
you're not number one  
you're not even the best  
and you can't win no real MC contest  
...  
but in a battle like this you know you'll lose  
between you and me who do you think they'll choose  
well if you think it's you I got bad news (“Battle of the Century”)

The phrase “I’m gonna rock your ass” so pointedly signals the communicative shift that has occurred here that I hardly need to spell out what the phrase means. The main point is that Moe Dee is no longer attempting to move the bodies of his audience but, rather, destroy the reputation of Busy Bee and thereby steal for himself the audience’s estimation of and investment in Busy Bee. Further, shifting the audience of listeners to a less concrete “they” opens the possibility for

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted from “Battle of the Century,” Rare and Manuscript Collection, Cornell University.

social commentary in rap—so long we understand “social” to refer to a more general social body than those immediately present at a performance. The most important point for us here, though, is that the authority to judge the value of a rap song no longer rests solely in the bodies of the audience. Instead, that authority becomes more a matter of knowledge about hip hop than presence and movement at a hip hop performance. To understand much of what Kool Moe Dee says, for example, you would have to know something about Busy Bee and how he raps.

This new style initiates the disintegration of the communicative context in which hip hop first occurred and it will never exist again.<sup>75</sup> One reason for this is the lyrical MC’s reliance on recordings of his performance. As Kool Moe Dee explains in *Beef*, “Only a few battle masters know how to beat the party MC. Because in a lot of cases the party MC will look like he won but if you listen to it on wax or you listen to it once you got the tape home, you will probably hear more poetic value in the other guy. But the party MC is about the live interaction.” In other words, the lyrical MC relies more on the quality of his lyrics than direct engagement of the audience to gain their approval. Consequently, one has to hear the performance multiple times to appreciate adequately its complexity. I would like to underline the point before advancing: there is a way in which rap needed to be recorded in order for us to appreciate it as art.<sup>76</sup> The big, important point of this whole discussion, though, is this: Kool Moe Dee’s performance at Harlem World on 30 December 1981 signifies the disintegration of the live audience’s authority in general regarding the value of rap. *It’s no longer a matter of being there but of having the record and, more importantly, the proper authority to judge it.* This marks the possibility for a decisive split between fans and critics as those who enjoy music and those who evaluate it.

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<sup>75</sup> Here as elsewhere I am basically following a linguist’s definition of style as audience design. See Allen Bell (1984).

<sup>76</sup> Just so we’re clear, I do mean to say that the advancement of hip hop as art relies and draws on an intensification of the commodity relations surrounding it.

## II. Hip hop as ideological state apparatus and the fetish character of German hip hop reception

It is pointless to search for a clear separation between impure ideological constructs, intended to serve capitalist accumulation, and pure, utterly uncompromised ideas, which would make it possible to criticize it.

-Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*

Concern in Germany about mass consumption's many dangers for civil society predates the world wars. For this reason, Alon Confino and Rudy Koshar find it odd that German historians neglected consumer culture as a focus of research until after reunification in 1989, whereas Anglo and American historians had begun such studies in the late 1970s (2001, 137). And here's how they explain the greater part of this post-Wende interest in consumer culture:<sup>77</sup> "the success of the West German model, its historical legitimacy as well as its power to reconstitute, for better or worse, the cities, markets and minds of the former East Germans, undoubtedly explains a good part of German historians' heightened interest in consumption as a social force" (138). In other words, consumer culture becomes a legitimate object of historical inquiry insofar as it is recognized as having profound socio-political consequences. Further, Confino and Koshar herald the renewed interest in consumer culture as a unique opportunity to do away with a very old opposition, that of high and low culture. "Once and for all, Germans had the opportunity to abandon the discursive ground on which the notional profundity of *Kultur* always and inevitably trumped the 'superficialities' of Western civilization, which included materialism, luxury and allegedly unthinking consumerism" (139). German hip hop would have been a productive site for scholarly investigations of consumer culture that move beyond the

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<sup>77</sup> "Wende" is a German word meaning *turning point* and marks the transition to a politically unified German state.

opposition between a high and low culture, between *Kultur* and mass consumption. For, as far as I'm concerned, there are plenty of cultural products here that are both popular and artfully sophisticated, not to put too fine of a point on it. As it turns out, critics don't agree.

A special issue of the journal *Debatte*, which focused on popular music in Germany, constitutes the most theoretically rigorous articulation of the divide under consideration, so we begin our analysis there. The introduction launches straightaway into this fraught territory as it characterizes an article I'll discuss in detail below. "Cheeseman's (sic) article underscores the gap between the core features of (minority) high culture and the forms and values of (majority) 'low' culture products" (Blühorn and Leaman 1998, 114). Curious here is that the authors make use of a conceptual opposition only to bracket one end of it with quotation marks as if they know better than to use demeaning language. My point here as throughout this section, though, is that you can't discuss high culture without constructing at the same time a refuse pile of out of everything that doesn't fit into that category. Further, we can't remedy the situation by hanging quotation marks around our refuse like air fresheners.

The music of the boy and girl groups that were sensationally popular in the mid to late 90s epitomizes the lower end of the division, which the critics establish. What are the criteria according to which critics locate boy and girl groups just beyond the margins of legitimate culture? As said, it became particularly difficult in the post-Wende years to dismiss the social, political, and cultural consequences of mass consumption. It was taken to be important, because it obviously affected how people lived; pop mattered because it had consequences. But that only means that we have to take it seriously as a something that shapes the lives of the masses—or so goes the logic of this position.

Monika Bloss in her article “The Making of Boys and Girls: Some Thoughts on a Current Phenomenon of Popular Music” justifies critical revulsion to the producers and products of this musical craze by undermining our estimation of the animating intention and skills of persons we might otherwise refer to as artists. “The boy groups themselves are likewise not bands that have grown up spontaneously as a result of shared interests or activities, but artificial constructions based on the particular ideas of managers, agents, producers or entrepreneurs interested in music” (158). In passing, we note the linguistic expansion of the categories high and low to include these oppositions: spontaneous and shared versus artificial and selfish. Further, “The groups that are able to survive parallel to each other on the German or the European market thus do not so much share particular skills or charisma, but rather have a strong and experienced management team as well as sufficient capital behind them which can be invested in production and marketing” (162). Here again, Bloss refines our understanding of the high and low opposition by grounding the low in profit oriented production. Accordingly, the skills and reputation of pop music producers are not the results of spontaneous artistic striving but simply the embodiments of capital.<sup>78</sup> “Boy groups are strategically organized media products,” as Bloss says (164); they have no intentions of their own and are, accordingly, not the products of their own development.

Tom Cheesman’s article in *Debatte* does not define the category of high culture explicitly, but rather focuses on ethnic-minority rappers “speaking out on behalf of new generations of post-migrant ‘communities.’... They resist the norms both of the ‘host culture’ and of the ‘parental culture’ by constructing a sub- and/or counter-cultural blend of elements of

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<sup>78</sup> This sentence was difficult to formulate given that, according to this understanding, there is no real difference between, say, the members of a boy group and the person that produces the music or the person that markets it. The entire notion of the artist as distinct from an art dealer is void given that in this case both have the same intention, namely to make more money into more money, which of course is the logic of capital.

both, and of a transnational youth culture born of the ‘Black Atlantic.’” Cheesman is especially critical and, hence, regards hip hop *in general* as a commercial enterprise. “The self-presentation of rappers, even the most politically committed, is always essentially marketing.”<sup>79</sup> But the important point when we consider Cheesman’s article in relation to Bloss’s article is that Cheesman discusses the self-representation of minorities operating in resistance to two dominant cultural traditions. In other words, these rappers express *themselves* (even if they are in one way or another commercially motivated) and not just the logic of capital or the logic of a dominant culture. So they at least have the potential to produce art that modernists can readily identify insofar as it opposes tradition.

From *Debatte* vol. 6 no. 2 we can trace a line back to two important scholarly contributions to hip hop reception in Germany: Dietmar Elflein’s article “From Krauts with Attitude to Turks with Attitude” and Ayhan Kaya’s dissertation, which was later published as ‘*Sicher in Kreuzberg*’: *Constructing Diasporas, Turkish Hip-Hop Youth in Berlin*.<sup>80</sup> Both of these texts make more or less the same argument in more or less the same fashion. If we isolate just three aspects of that argument, we can grasp the fundamentals of hip hop reception in Germany.

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<sup>79</sup> Cheesman’s ultra-criticism leads him to make a couple of problematic claims. He glosses the film *Wild Style*, for example, as “hiphopxploitation.” Are there a few neglected facts regarding the film: the idea for the movie came from Fab Five Freddy (hip hop legend who was also featured in the film); the writer and director Charlie Ahearn was an artist who was shooting documentary street footage at the time anyway (he also had connections to Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat); the film has been sampled ever since by hip hop artists (like Nas at the beginning of *Illmatic*). Further, Cheesman claims that the entire German music industry is racist: “In this process of commercialization, the majority of beneficiaries were, like all four of the *Fanta Vier*, white 100% Germans.” At the time Cheesman was writing, Samy Deluxe was just making headway as a recording artist and is now regarded as the most commercially successful German rapper. Samy, as everyone knows, is a black guy.

<sup>80</sup> Cheesman had read manuscripts of both prior to writing his article in 1998. Elflein’s article is a translation and refinement of an earlier article published in German. See Dietmar Elflein (1997). It might also be noted that this little explosion of scholarship on hip hop in Germany came in 1998 just as hip hop began to outpace techno in Germany in terms of commercial success. As Greg Bischoff, music programming and production executive at MTV Germany said of 1998, “This is the year of German hip-hop.” See what amounts to one of the richest histories of the commercial end of hip hop in Germany: Christian Arndt (1998).

First point: politically engaged hip hop in Germany emerges in a context of pervasive racism. Or as Kaya puts it, “Berlin-Turkish hip-hop youth have developed a politics of diaspora to tackle exclusion and discrimination in their country of settlement” such that hip hop functions as the means for these youth to “transcend the discipline and power of the nation-state and to integrate themselves into a global youth culture” (15). The basis for the racist-state argument is always immigration law regarding Guest-workers (*Gastarbeiter*) who have temporary legal status to work in Germany. As Elflein explains, “as a matter of principle the ‘guests’ are neither automatically German nationals nor can they hold a double nationality. This ‘institutionalized racism’ and the various forms of discrimination in almost all areas of daily life nurture the feeling of being an ‘alien,’ ‘a stranger in one’s own country’”(1998, 259). He’s quoting here from the critics’ most quoted song, “Fremd im eigenen Land” (Alien in my own Country), by their most quoted group, Advanced Chemistry (I’ll discuss the song in the following section). At stake here, though, is the question of the racist German state, which is by no means as straightforward as hip hop critics present the case. As Dietrich Thränhardt argues, the foreignness of workers is generally highlighted more in the German context than their race (1995, 21). In the late 1960s, for example, many work contracts with guest workers were not renewed so as to protect the national labor force in a contracting labor market (22). Indeed, outside of hip hop scholarship, it is generally accepted that the German state attempts to control its labor market with its immigration laws (Bauder 2006, Cohen 1987), which is different than weeding out or restricting the rights of persons based on their racial profile. In this essay, though, I am primarily interested in the consequences of the critical discourse and, as I say, one of its tenets is that the law of the land is racist.

Second point: politically engaged hip hop artists in Germany are quintessential creative agents insofar as they operate in opposition not only to a racist context but also to their parents' cultural heritage. Kaya, for example, employs Gramsci's notion of an organic intellectual to explain how Turkish youth in Berlin "attempt to disrupt the social, political, and cultural hegemony of the dominant groups" (180). She also draws on theory that understands youth as "active agents who are capable of producing, reproducing, and articulating their cultures" (33). Elflein has similar things to say: "never before in the history of German popular music have so many immigrant youngsters produced a culture which is not rooted in the heritage of their parent" (1998, 255). He traces certain aspects of German hip hop back to "the style of self-production of marginal US Americans" (258). So there is a way in which these critics consistently call attention to the autonomy of minority-agents to operate outside of established social, cultural, and political structures. This recalls an opposition discussed earlier in relation to boy bands, that of spontaneous versus artificial production. Quite clearly, then, Turkish hip hop youth (to borrow a phrase from Kaya) embody precisely the reverse of what boy and girl groups embody (spontaneous opposition / calculated growth).

Third point: commercial rappers produce incompetent drivel that approaches the lowest common denominator. On this point, Elflein quotes a journalist who wrote extensively on hip hop in the early 90s (basically the Nelson George of the German hip hop scene), Günther Jacob: "this low standard aims conspicuously at a wide entrance in the German market" (Elflein 1998, 291).<sup>81</sup> Critics generally focus on Die Fantastischen Vier (The Fantastic Four), the first German hip hop group to achieve commercial success, as a paradigmatic example of the low quality lyrics that commercial rappers produce. Once again, Elflein: "in such commercial practice the

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<sup>81</sup> Many of Günther Jacob's journalistic writings were published in book form as *Agit-Pop: Black Music and White Listeners* (1994). See page 214 for this quote.

complex structures of rhyming in rap too often become reduced to a stress on the end-rhythm: ‘Ich bin S-M-U-D-O von den Fantastischen Vier / und trinke gern Bananensaft mit kühlem Weizenbier’ (I am S-M-U-D-O of the Fantastic Four / and I like to drink banana juice with cool wheat beer)” (1998, 259).<sup>82</sup> This is the only time that Elflein quotes from Die Fantastischen Vier and he doesn’t do it in order to interpret the text but to provide evidence that nothing interesting occurs in this watered down, commercial rap. On the other hand, one might have pointed out that this is a curious thing for an MC to say insofar as a Bananenweizen (banana juice + wheat beer) is either a girly drink or a juvenile one. In other words, it could be argued, Smudo is saying that he disregards certain social expectations regarding his behavior. Apparently, Smudo’s point—if he had one—is lost though. Jacob’s point, on the other hand, that Die Fantastischen Vier “have nothing to say” was not (1994, 214).

There is an aspect of the German hip hop story that critics have trouble with and that is the role of politicians, social workers, and teachers, which critics treat with their characteristic cynicism. Elflein cites Jakob again on the point: “the only professionals who were interested in them [rap groups that could be labeled Turkish or Kurd] were educators, trying to instrumentalise the competitive structures of hip hop for their pedagogical work. The Berlin senate even invested three million marks in order to inform social workers about this scene” (Elflein 1998, 263). The implication here is that professionals came to an established hip hop scene with their own selfish agendas. Cheesman makes the same argument:

The attention received by rap and hip hop in these years [following Advanced Chemistry’s 1992 release “Fremd im eigenen Land”], and the reputation it established for well-meaning liberalism and multiculturalism (despite some more radical elements representing anti-capitalist, anarchist anti-fascism and anti-racism), did much to bring it out of the underground and establish it as a legitimate subcultural form, exciting both commercial and pedagogical interest. (1998, 197)

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<sup>82</sup> I have slightly altered Elflein’s transcription and translation.

At stake here, of course, is the purity of the oppositional force that minority-agents constitute. And that force is only pure, according to this line of criticism, insofar as it is grounded outside of the dominant political, social, and cultural paradigms.

Ayşe Çağlar's work on hip hop in Berlin stands out in this regard insofar as she calls explicit attention to the fact that "what is celebrated as the relatively spontaneous development of the critical and rebellious voice of the marginalized minority youth from the street was, in fact, from the very beginning institutionally incorporated into the 'center' through the youth centers and social workers" (Çağlar 1998, 249-250). I'll discuss where I stand in relation to Çağlar's work below but I first want to mention a handful of important dates in the emergence of hip hop in Germany. Fatima El-Tayeb says that the first rap song ever recorded in German was Fresh Family's "Ahmet Gündüz" (2003, 475), which deals largely with the prejudices that a person with Turkish migration background confronts while living in Germany. El-Tayeb says they released it in 1990; rap.de and Wikipedia say it was 1991. King Size Terror released the first rap in Turkish that was produced in Germany in 1991. Die Fantastischen Vier also released their first full album in 1991; their first mega-hit ("Die da") followed in 1992 on their second album.<sup>83</sup> Advanced Chemistry released their first single in 1992 and their first full album in 1995. On the basis of these dates, it's fairly clear that the recorded history of hip hop in Germany begins around 1991. Critics generally agree that it was Advanced Chemistry and Die Fantastischen Vier who popularized German hip hop, albeit for different audiences and with different motivations, in 1992.

On 9 March 1990, *taz* ran a noteworthy article when read in relation to the critical discourse on German hip hop ("Die volle Gleichberechtigung muß her" [Full equal rights must

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<sup>83</sup> Die Fantastischen Vier were also on the compilation album *Krauts with Attitudes: German HipHop vol. 1*, which was released in 1991 by Bombastic Records.

be established]). It obviously appeared at a transitional moment: the music that had been confined to live performances was about to explode its context. According to the *taz*, the Turkish Parents' Association in Berlin (*türkische Elternverein*)<sup>84</sup> held a community discussion about youth gangs on Wednesday, 7 March 1990. Representatives from the Christian Democrats (CDU), the Social Democrats (SPD), the party that would later become the Green Party, the police, and the Union for Education and Science (GEW) were in attendance along with parents and students. Those leading the meeting were in accord on this point: “the frustration and aggression of foreign youth is a result of inadequate integration, a difficult social environment, and a lack of possibilities for cultural development.” Towards the end of the evening the director of the organization for Turkish psychological and social service professionals called for the immediate implementation of programs that included hip hop parties and spaces for graffiti. Politicians were said to have taken notes on those suggestions. On 26 June 1990, *taz* reported that the Berlin Senate created 15 “street worker” positions (“Jugendgangs: Senat verschafft sich Alibi” [Youth Gangs: the Senate Creates an Alibi for Itself]). Their task would be to counsel youth, work as intermediaries between rivals, and—of course—organize hip hop parties and graffiti projects.

My point in recalling the two articles from the *taz* above is to begin to push Caglar's work further—beyond a mere “contextualization of a given form of popular culture into the networks of concrete social and political structures and institutions” (258). The thesis that hip hop youth have developed oppositional political identities in more or less spontaneous fashion without the support of politicians and other Turkish professionals fetishizes the productive capacity of these

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<sup>84</sup> Since 1988, the Berlin senate has funded the association, which acts in the interests of parents and students of Turkish descent.

persons—so much is clear.<sup>85</sup> But the question is what function the privileged form of hip hop serves in the 1990s. In other words, certain kinds of hip hop in Berlin unequivocally become integrated into the set of ideological state apparatuses and the question is to what end. Critics from the media as well as the academy consistently attempted to define the proper use of the cultural form as a variety of anti-racist political practice, whereby social critique in terms of productivity itself became an object of critique. To the extent that immigrants in Germany had traditionally developed politically charged identities not in terms of race but in terms of productivity, this entire critical hip hop project takes on an air consistent with a neoliberal logic that sought to undermine the power and influence of labor unions so as to limit resistance to the flexibilization of labor markets. As Foucault and others have pointed out, liberalism (and hence also neoliberalism) is premised on the activity of “free” individuals; agency is not a sign of redemptive politics so much as the prerequisite to adopt neoliberal forms of subjectivity. Accordingly, the racialized and culturally circumscribed immigrant-agent—stripped of its identity premised on workers’ rights—is a quintessential neoliberal subject, not an emissary of revolutionary politics. It strikes me as all the more problematic that the low-wage sector exploded in size and scope in the mid-90s, which is of course precisely when the critical reception of hip hop was most influential.

### **III. The emergence of the professional *Versager***

Irgendwo auf einer Fähre Richtung Karriere  
saßen mehrere, eher leerere Köpfe mit ’ner Riesenschere  
fischten die wenigen, frischen MCs aus’m Wasser  
schnitten sich was ab und ließen die Guten dann in den Fluten verbluten.

(Somewhere on a ferry headed in the direction of a career

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<sup>85</sup> The argument is reminiscent of how traditional Marxism understood the proletariat, namely as a force that was not so much created historically in and through capitalist social relations but that would overcome those relations as if automatically from without. For an incisive critique of traditional Marxism see Moishe Postone, (1993, Part 1 and passim). I assume that critics switch out minorities for the proletariat partly in response to the end of socialism as it existed in Europe prior to 1989.

sat numerous, rather hollow heads with enormous scissors  
they fished the few fresh MCs out of the water  
cut something off and let the good ones then bleed to death in the floods)

-Absolute Beginner, "Das Boot" (The Boat) [1998]

In the last section, I clarified this essential point: prior to any widespread distribution of rap in Germany, there was an audience for hip hop (other than the primary consumers) consisting of persons with the authority to make judgments regarding the symbolic value of the music. And they weren't into it because it was so much fun. Here it is helpful to recall Bourdieu's point concerning dominant culture and its role in perpetuating fictions of social unity.

The dominant culture contributes to the real integration of the dominant class (by facilitating the communication between an its members and by distinguishing them from other classes); it also contributes to the fictitious integration of society as a whole, and thus to the apathy (false consciousness) of the dominated classes; and finally, it contributes to the legitimation of the established order by establishing distinctions (hierarchies) and legitimating these distinctions. (Bourdieu 1991, 167)

It could be argued that hip hop critics have facilitated the integration of hip hop youth into the dominant culture (otherwise of course discussed as "high culture") by commenting on and hence in one way or another validating their claims. Thus, hip hop criticism—following this logic—has contributed to expanding dominant culture to include the products of otherwise marginalized youth and thereby also expanded the public sphere to include alternative political projects. While there is something to this, the integration of this discourse into the dominant culture is premised on two processes that remain questionable. On the one hand, the statements of hip hop youth were only admitted into legitimate discourse insofar as they were grounded in an anti-racist project. As I will show below in my discussion of Advanced Chemistry, this is quite reductive. On the other hand, hip hop criticism also created a hierarchy among hip hop artists, whereby statements that were not grounded in an anti-racist project were either ignored or labeled as frivolous. Interestingly, there is a way in which this critical discourse that appropriated certain

statements as legitimate and rendered others illegitimate licensed hip hop clowns and party rappers to talk about themselves as losers who would never amount to anything. In other words, some MCs became all the more cool given that authorities found their music insipid and ridiculous.

On and on and on, then, into No Man's Land. The story I want to tell begins with Die Fantastischen Vier and their first smash hit, "Die da!?!)" ("Her!?!"). The song consists of a conversation between two friends, Smudo and Thomas D, each telling of having met a girl the weekend prior. Smudo begins: "ich muss dir jetzt erzählen, was mir wiederfahren ist / jetzt seh ich die Zukunft positiv, denn ich bin Optimist" (I have to tell you now what happened to me / now I see the future positive as I am an optimist). His optimism appears to be grounded in his plans to see the woman again "that spun his head," with whom he ended up having lots of fun. Thomas D replies that he is happy for Smudo and that he is happy himself given that he, too, met a girl. But he has a slightly different relation to the prospect of meeting her again. "Na ja, ich gebe zu, ich hab getan, als hätt' ich Geld / doch alles lief wie geschmiert, jetzt mache ich mir Sorgen / denn wir reden und verabreden uns für Übermorgen" (Well, I have to admit, I acted as if I had money / though everything ran smoothly, now I am concerned / because we're talking and making plans for the day after tomorrow). In the third verse, both friends become increasingly aware that the woman involved in each of their lives costs them money.<sup>86</sup> Then, as the verse closes, Thomas D sees the girl he's been talking about only to realize that Smudo was seeing the same girl, who is now with a third guy (explaining why she couldn't go out with either Smudo or Thomas D on that particular day). Although both are surprised to figure this out, the

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<sup>86</sup> There is a correspondence here to N.W.A.'s "A Bitch Iz A Bitch" from 1989 in that the woman involved in "Die Da!?!)" uses Smudo and Thomas D. for their money. While this likeness clarifies the intellectual history of "Die Da!?!)" focusing on what is the same would obscure the differences, which run far deeper and are really more important for understanding either song.

revelation that they are suckers doesn't spoil the mood of the song. No one screams, hollers, or calls for retribution. Instead, it were as if neither really cares that the woman has multiple partners and is using them all for money. Smudo had fun regardless and now Thomas D. doesn't need to worry so much about his financial problems insofar as two other guys are splitting the bill. That at any rate is how I explain the lighthearted tone of a song that both begins and ends with a cheerful whistling of its melody.

Fettes Brot was another enormously successful group that came together in the early 90's. One of their biggest hits remains "Jein" (Yes *and* No),<sup>87</sup> which they released in 1996. The song consists of three dilemmas that mobilize a similar structure; we'll focus on the second in which the narrator is in love with his best friend's girlfriend.

ich will sie, sie will mich, das weiß sie, das weiß ich  
nur mein bester Freund, der weiß es nicht  
und somit sitz' ich sozusagen in der Zwickmühle<sup>88</sup>  
und das ist auch der Grund warum ich mich vom Schicksal gefickt fühle

(I want her, she wants me, this she knows, this I know  
it's just my best friend who doesn't know  
and so I'm caught in a catch-22  
and that's the reason why I feel fucked by fate)

So the narrator is forced to choose between what he wants to do and what he is obligated as a friend to do. In other words, fate's catch-22 consists of the irreconcilability of both pursuing personal pleasure and following social expectation. Here's how that plays out:

Es steigen einem die Tränen in die Augen, wenn man sieht  
was mit mir passiert und was mit mir geschieht  
Es erscheinen Engelchen und Teufelchen auf meiner Schulter  
Engel links, Teufel rechts: *Lechz!*  
*Nimm dir die Frau, sie will es doch auch*  
*kannst du mir erklären, wozu man gute Freunde braucht?*  
*Halt, der will dich linken schreit der Engel von der Linken*  
*weißt du nicht, dass sowas scheiße ist und Lügner stinken?*

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<sup>87</sup> "Jein" is a common slang formation consisting of the German for yes ("ja") and no ("nein").

<sup>88</sup> This refers to a situation in the board game Mühle, in which one will eventually lose regardless of how one plays out the game.

Und so streiten sich die beiden um mein Gewissen  
und ob ihr's glaubt oder nicht, mir geht es echt beschissen  
Und während sich der Teufel und der Engel anschreien  
entscheide ich mich für ja, nein, ich mein' jein!

(Tears come to one's eyes when one sees  
what's going on and what's going down  
an angel and a devil appear on my shoulder  
angel left, devil right: *Lust!*  
*Take the woman, she wants it too*  
*can you explain why one needs good friends?*  
*Stop, he wants to con you* shouts the angel on the left  
*don't you know that something like this is shit and liars stink*  
And so both battle for my conscience  
and whether you believe it or not, this totally sucks  
and while the devil and angel scream at each other  
I decide for yes, no, I mean—yes *and* no!)

Whereas pursuing romance and having fun in “Die da!?!” came at a personal monetary cost, “Jein” considers the social costs of the same behavior. The narrator’s conflicted response, interestingly, retains the mark of both ends of the dilemma: it does not resolve it—other than strictly on the level of the signifier.

The story I’m telling is a bit of a patch-work but it will regain a fairly obvious momentum soon enough, so just hang in there. Advanced Chemistry plays a role, too. Here’s what I think is worth mentioning. The track “Fremd im eigenen Land” (Alien in my own Country) is quite adamantly a song about persons not receiving what they deserve. Each verse begins with the line “I have a green passport with a golden eagle on it,” which is to say that each rapper emphasizes that he *is* German. Nevertheless, each feels the need to prove the point (hence the passport), given that he is not treated like other Germans who look German. And this is how the reference to guest workers fits in the song:

leider kommt selten jemand, der fragt,  
wie es um die schlechtbezahlte, unbeliebte Arbeit steht.  
Kaum einer ist da, der überlegt, auf das Wissen Wert legt,  
warum es diesem Land so gut geht,  
dass der Gastarbeiter seit den 50ern unentwegt  
zum Wirtschaftsaufbau, der sich blühend bewegt,

mit Nutzen beitrug und noch beiträgt,  
mit einer schwachen Position in der Gesellschaft lebt,

(unfortunately hardly anyone appears who asks  
what's up with the poorly-paid, unpopular work  
Hardly anyone contemplates or values knowing  
why this country is so well off  
why the guest worker—consistently since the 50s—  
has contributed and still contributes with usefulness  
to the economic growth, which blossoms,  
yet occupies such a weak position in society)

It's not a coincidence of course that what I emphasize here is precisely the point that journalist Günther Jacob lashes out against (as well as Cheesman, who cites Jacob on the point). "The text of the album is well thought out—until the part where guest workers are defended with the argument that they are after all useful for Germany... From the standpoint of anti-racism, this is exceptionally counterproductive" (Jacob 1994, 221). As far as the story I'm telling goes, the song is important because so many other MCs draw on this basic premise: one's social standing ought to be premised on one's productive contribution to that society, understood in terms of the nation-state.

Blumentopf's first album *Kein Zufall* (Not an Accident) from 1997 was influential insofar as it further developed a way of discussing the MC as a person that deserved respect because he had earned it (and not because respect was his birthright). "Ich will Platten verkaufen und nicht mich selbst / und mein Ding durchziehen, egal was du davon hältst" (I want to sell records and not myself / to do my thing, regardless of your evaluation of it).<sup>89</sup> The line is taken from the

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<sup>89</sup> Incidentally, the song is clearly addressed to critics in a very general sense, that is, to anyone who is in the position to form legitimate judgments about the value of the music and, consequently, about the person creating it. The position bears structural resemblance to how N.W.A. positioned themselves vis-à-vis the audience that they addressed directly, which obviously consisted of persons who weren't into hip hop. The album *Niggaz4life* is, as is said in the "Intro," "for all those who don't believe in the real gangsta shit." And that is what's really groundbreaking about the position that N.W.A. developed. When they say "you," they weren't talking to an audience they were rocking (as the party MC) or a competitor (as the lyrical MC) but a "you" that thought the worst of them. As Eazy-E said, "if you think I'm fuckin' your wife / you're muthafuckin' right / yo—cuz I'm a nigga for life."

song “Man kann nicht alles haben” (One can’t have everything) and there are a number of other songs on the album that have been foundational for how German MCs talk about what they do.

In Blumentopf’s first smash hit, “6 Meter 90,” the narrator tells a story in which his sister falls into a depression and kills herself following the break-up of boy group sensation Take That. The story appears on some level to be a farce, poking fun at the absurd level of fanaticism that boy groups generated. But there’s more to it, an affective underbelly expressed in a soulfully hummed melody and a tension between comic-tragic events and a world that doesn’t care either way. The chorus, which articulates this last tension, entails some of the most repeated lines in German hip hop.

Es steigen einem die Tränen in die Augen  
Weißt du nicht dass sowas scheiße ist?  
Es ist schon wirklich seltsam, wie die Dinge gehen  
ich schau’ mir die Welt an  
und kann sie manchmal einfach nicht verstehen  
ich weiß, das Leben ist nicht immer fair  
doch die Erde dreht sich weiter  
als ob nichts gewesen wäre

Tears come to one’s eyes  
Don’t you know that something like this is shit?  
It is really quite strange how things go  
I look at the world  
and sometimes just can’t understand it  
I know life isn’t always fair  
yet the world moves forward  
as if nothing were the matter

The first two lines here are of course sampled from “Jein.” What was, though, in that song an inner conflict between “my” desire and “your” expectations for “me” is in “6 Meter 90” a conflict between a music fan and an uncaring world. For, it is the inability of non-fans to understand how important music is for this girl’s life that propels the question “don’t you know...” Interestingly, this recalls how Blumentopf talks about hip hop throughout their first album. Consider, for example, this line from “Rendezvous (ich und du)” (Rendezvous—you and

me) “Mikrofone, Texte, Beats sind meine Welt / und so lang ich leb’ wird meine Produktion von raps nicht eingestellt” (Microphones, texts, beats are my world / and, as long as I live, my production of rap won’t be halted). In other words, we can read “6 Meter 90” as figuratively autobiographical—as if Holunder (the MC rapping) was narrating what would happen if he was deprived of hip hop, that is his life wouldn’t be worth living. Further, if we return for a moment to “Die da!?!” and “Jein,” we might read them as songs about enjoying and producing hip hop. In the first case, it is something that is fun but costs money—even if it can never really belong to the narrators as white guys. In the second, it constitutes the object of the narrator’s desire, but pursuing it involves transgressing others’ expectations of him as a white guy.

Here we are back at the question of race. While critics often enough acknowledge the difficulty of categorizing hip hop in Germany along racial lines (because it’s such a mixed scene), they never hesitate to evaluate it (and its revolutionary potential), as I say, along racial lines. On this point they turn their backs on a significant tradition, the literature of migration in Germany, which has not primarily been articulated in terms of racial identities. A great deal of German hip hop, however, appears to be in conversation with this tradition. The group Absolute Beginner carries on this conversation, and I’d like to pick up from their album right where the epigraph to this section ended.

In trüben Gewässern taten Piraten warten  
 Wollten uns Hanseaten an den Kragen uns unsere Styles abjagen  
 Die Penner wollten uns entern, doch wir brachten sie zum kentern  
 Denn mein DJ hat ’ne Motor-säge und die wiegt zehn Zentner  
 Wir wollten nie ertrinken und wenn dann am eigenen Schweiß

(In gloomy seas did pirates wait  
 had us hanseatics by the collar to steal our styles  
 the bums wanted to board our ship, but we capsized them  
 cuz my DJ has a chainsaw that weighs 10 centner<sup>90</sup>  
 we never want to drown, and if, then in our own sweat)

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<sup>90</sup> A centner was a unit of weight used in Hanseatic trade.

Of particular interest is that Einfeldt (the MC rapping the first four lines here) establishes his identity in terms of labor (not race). He is saying that he belongs to a class of commercial moguls or, in other words, that he is really good at his job. In referencing hanseatics, he also silently mobilizes the opposing term “kanake,” which was historically a slur for persons descending from southern Europe. The term lost much of its edge as a slur, though, in the mid 1990s when it appeared frequently in discussions about the integration of foreigners in Germany.<sup>91</sup> The point that I would like to emphasize here is that the critical discourse on German hip hop refused to acknowledge claims to legitimacy based on productivity. And this means that despite a number of German MCs talking to no end about how much they work, they never quite amount to critical successes.<sup>92</sup>

The contradiction between the hip-hop trope that generated identity in terms of productivity and the critical discourse that discounted identity in terms of productivity often found its way into hip hop lyrics. “Hiphop ist mein liebstes Hobby ohne Scheiß und echt / hiphop ist mein Job ich leb’ davon—mehr schlecht als recht” (hip hop is my favorite hobby—no shit, seriously / hip hop is my job, I live from it—more poorly than properly).<sup>93</sup> A number of MCs have made a career out of talking about their non-productivity, their refusal to affirm the social order by accepting one of its legitimate roles—even if they were and are very successful MCs.

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<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Feridun Zaimoglu (1995).

<sup>92</sup> I might also point out that there exists *in these terms* a conversation between German German rappers and German rappers with migration background. If hip hop constitutes integrative practice in Germany, then it is precisely when it is speaking in terms of labor.

<sup>93</sup> The quote is from Eins Zwo, “Liebeslogbuch” (Dearlogbook) on *Gefährliches Halbwissen* (Dangerous Half Knowledge) (Hamburg: Yo Mama, 1999). Eimsbush Entertainment, the label that Einfeldt from Absolute Beginner founded, and Yo Mama’s Records were responsible for producing much of the music that came out of Hamburg in the late 1990s.

Some of the most influential MCs to discuss themselves and their “work” in these terms came from Austria.<sup>94</sup>

Schönheitsfehler (disfigurement or flaw) is particularly worth mentioning in this regard. They had their first hit in 1996 with “Immer Schön Langsam” (Always Nice and Slow). The song revolves around the opposition between stress and loss, on the one hand, and ease and gain, on the other. “Ich stress’ mich täglich ab und sag mir was ich davon hab’ / bin fertig mit den Nerven und schlecht darauf den ganzen Tag” (I stress myself out every day and tell me what I get from it / my nerves are shot and all day I’m in a bad mood). “Schön langsam / kommst du viel reicher an / denn der Weg ist das Ziel / und das Leben ist ein Spiel” (nice and slow / you arrive much richer / as the path is your goal / and life is a game). In 2000, their single “Fuck You” expressed a much more aggressive rejection of social expectations. The first verse is directed as if to a parent:<sup>95</sup>

Du hattest für mein Leben einen anderen Plan  
in dem ich aber so gut wie nicht vorkam  
ausser als Projektion für Dein verkacktes Leben  
...  
Für Dich bin ich abnormal  
völlig aus der Norm  
Ich weiß, ich bin für Dich ’n Natural Born Versager  
vom anderen Lager  
Wenigstens bin ich kein opportunistischer Jasager so wie Du

(You had some other plan for my life  
in which I didn’t even have a role  
other than as an ideal image in your full-a-shit life  
...)

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<sup>94</sup> The hip hop scene in Austria consisted primarily of three groups until recently: Schönheitsfehler, Texta, and Total Chaos. All three groups have not only been in conversation with the German groups I’ve been discussing and will discuss below, but they also often toured and recorded together. Because German rap groups and Austrian rap groups have been so mutually influential, the category of German hip hop must include and imply Austrian hip hop as well. Furthermore, Germany constitutes a huge market for Austrian rap groups, so referring to Austrian rap groups as Austrian rap groups can be misleading.

<sup>95</sup> The video for “Fuck You” has each member of the group standing isolated in a plexiglas box on a public square. In this regard, we can read the “you” of the title as a quite general term of address. Texta and Kamp und Whizz Vienna made similar use of public spaces in their videos for “(So Schnö Kaust Gor Net) Schaun!” and “So Sorry” respectively. The videos are available on Youtube.

for you I'm abnormal  
totally out of the norm  
I know for you I'm a natural born loser  
from some other place  
at least I'm not an opportunistic yea-sayer like you)

Here we see a further development of some of the basic elements from “Die da!?!” and “Jein,” whereby affirmative optimism in those early songs becomes here conservative idealism and, hence, something to negate. In standard German, the verb “versagen” means *to fail to perform the prescribed function* and can accordingly mean *to fail or refuse to work*. A *Versager* would then be something of a deadbeat or loser. Insofar as Schönheitsfehler uses the term “Versager” in relation to “Jasager” (yea-sayer), the term acquires a critical connotation. To be a *Versager* means to refuse and reject a number of social expectations.<sup>96</sup> It is important to note here, though, that the narrator maintains a certain distance between himself and the *Versager*-identity. While he opts for the social position of the *Versager* so as to circumvent dominant values and their attendant pressures, he also emphasizes that the *Versager*-identity exists for the yea-sayer and is in that regard a by-product of the yea-sayer's values.

Before moving on, I would very briefly like to mention two further contributions to the trope of yea-saying: Texta's “Neinsager” (Naysayer) from 1999 and Eins Zwo's “Altes Lied von und mit Mutter Natur” (Same Old Song About and With Mother Nature) from 2001. Huckey of Texta develops the thematic along an explicitly political line:

Wir reden mit allen bis jeder “Nein” sagt  
dann bilden wir eine Gemeinschaft  
und wenn jeder seine Netze weiter spinnte  
hätten wir eine Menge Gleichgesinnte  
und sind am Schluß genügend dabei  
gründen wir eine Neinsager-Partei

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<sup>96</sup> Dendemann of Eins Zwo makes use of the term “Versager” in “Die Omi Aus Dem 1. Stock” (The Grandma from the First Floor) [1999] though he comes at it from a slightly different angle: “Ein Prachtexemplar in Sachen Beats und Texten / aber ein Versager in Sachen Abschalten und Relaxen” (a role model in matters beats and texts but a deadbeat in matters turning-off and relaxing). In other words, he's talking about MCing as if it's an admirable occupation that he works hard at.

und erobern den Planeten nebenbei

(We'll talk to everyone until they say "no"  
then we'll build an alliance  
and if everyone would spin his net further  
we would have a crowd of the like-minded  
and if enough are with us at the end  
we'll found a Naysayer Party  
and conquer the planet in our spare time)

Dendemann's text is less straightforward because of the numerous oppositions that he unites as an MC. Just to give you a taste, here is the chorus:

Es ist nur das alte Lied  
vom ja sagen und nein meinen  
vom quer stellen und einreihen  
Es ist nur das alte Lied  
vom laut denken und still schweigen  
vom Haupt senken und Willen zeigen

(It's just the same old song  
about saying "yes" and meaning *no*  
about standing in opposition and standing in line  
It's just the same old song  
about thinking out loud and remaining silent  
about head-bowing and will-showing)

So the MCs that become lumped together because they didn't produce the anti-racist high art of minority-agents (even if a number are in fact minorities) can be said to contribute to a Naysayer Party. For the MCs and their fans, the party is of the political variety. For the critics, the party is of the variety that serves Bananenweizen. Oh, and I nearly forgot, welcome to No Man's Land, where one's voice has commercial value (paid by likeminded fans) but essentially no legitimate cultural value.

Back to Schönheitsfehler. As I say, the narrator of "Fuck You" has an ambivalent relation to the *Versager*-identity, which—as should be clear by this point—is also a vocational identity and a calling (in the sense of Weber), which implies an entire rational of conduct. He accepts the other's condemnation (I know *for you* I'm a natural born loser) insofar as it gives him reason to

reject dominant cultural values such as those embodied in the “two cars, two kids, dog and garden townhouse life.” In “Der Anfang vom Ende” (The Beginning of the End)<sup>97</sup> by Kamp & Whizz Vienna, however, this social condemnation is fully internalized so as to preempt any further condemnation from without. In other words, the condemnation fundamentally constitutes the position from which the narrator speaks, as if all the while building a defense against others. The first lines of the song, which are also the first lines of the album, achieve this explicitly. “*I’m a loser, I’m a loser / Wien, Wien, ich bin ein loser baby / Versager ohne Zukunft, no future baby / Can’t fuck with... Kamp ONE!*” (Vienna, Vienna, I’m a loser baby / Loser without a future, no future baby). Basically, my entire point here can be illustrated with a quick comparison of the syntax surrounding “fuck” in these two songs: “Fuck you” (as rejection after insult) versus “[You] Can’t fuck with” (as a preemptive defense).

In this section, I have organized and commented on something of a German hip-hop hit parade. The story began with some MCs (Die Fantastische Vier) who affirmed a particular social relation that was nothing if not fun. Other guys (Fettes Brot) were perplexed, seeing in that relation the impossibility of both having fun and meeting one’s obligations. There were yet others (Advanced Chemistry and Absolute Beginner) who, appearing to discuss a different variety of social relation (labor as opposed to romance), attempted to convince us that they deserve more or at least that they deserve what they have (“a refrigerator full of applause”). Of those who have drawn on the work of all of these forerunners (and there are many), Dendemann of Eins Zwo seems to me worth mentioning in particular. Much of his work has been about

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<sup>97</sup> The song is from their only album *Versager ohne Zukunft* (Loser without a Future) (Vienna: Vienna International Records, 2009), which ends with an instrumental titled “Das Ende vom Anfang” (The End of the Beginning). Kamp frequently draws on the work of Blumentopf in his texts and I should mention that Blumentopf had a track titled “Anfang vom Ende” (Beginning of the End) on their first album. The Blumentopf text is addressed to a female who “acts as if [the narrator] were not at all there.” The absence of the other’s affection leads then to the beginning of the end. In Kamp’s work, on the other hand, it were as if that absence structured the entire communication from the beginning.

resolving one of the German MC's central paradoxes, which consists of having fun while working hard. To quote the "professional chiller," "Der Stress, der Spass, die Pech- und Glückssträhnen / dem Auf und Ab vorbeugen, heisst sich zurücklehnen" (The stress, the fun, the bad and good luck streaks / giving in to pacing means leaning back). Of course I didn't cover any of the controversial work produced by the label Aggro Berlin. Since I'm already past page 30 and I anticipate your patience to be waning, I won't get into it.<sup>98</sup> I will say this though, it wouldn't take long to show you how, for example, "Nein" (No) and "Jeder Kriegt Was Er Verdient" (Everyone Gets What They Earn) by Sido interestingly engage the cultural configuration I've sketched here.<sup>99</sup>

Before concluding, I would like to make just one more connection. A cultural configuration in which it makes sense to discuss partying as a rejection of social pressures—that is, in which the pursuit of personal pleasure cannot be reduced to a personal matter—is directly relevant to discussions of the European welfare state. An album like *Versager ohne Zukunft* (Loser without a Future) allows the listener—if for only the duration of the album—to submit to the full force of the social and cultural pressures to have a socially desirable career (among other things) despite not having anything of the sort insofar as it speaks of being a loser as if that were what "you" wanted from "me." In other words, being a loser is spoken of as if it were a calling, i.e. a career that confirms social standing. And I'll end this section with a group that has made the connection between a career as a German MC and a career as a welfare recipient explicit.

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<sup>98</sup> Just so we're clear, this is not a copout. I'm not trying to sweep the violence, racism, and sexism so often associated with the label under the rug. It would simply take too long to discuss the issues with the complexity they require.

<sup>99</sup> A special note to my fellow fans, if there happen to be any reading this: yeah, yeah, yeah. I've listened to Huss und Hodn as much as you have. I get it. But that doesn't mean that I'm not occasionally in the mood for Deine Lieblings Rapper, regardless of the fact that they aren't my favorite rappers.

Consider “Wenn es brennt” (When it burns) from K.I.Z.’s third album *Hahnenkampf*

(Cockfight):

Es gibt viel zu tun, viel zu viel, fang es gar nicht an  
Du willst ein Ziel im Leben? Guck dir deinen Vater an  
Wenn du hart kämpfst (kämpfst), kriegst du seinen Platz  
und hängst auch jeden Morgen in der Kneipe ab  
Du kannst jeden Tag wie deine letzten leben  
Du musst nur jeden Tag das Gleiche tun:  
(Das wird schon, das wird schon)  
brich die Schule ab  
stich einen Schwulen ab  
Auch du kannst ein Künstler sein: bemal ein Judengrab  
Im Ghetto mag dich jeder  
Ein-Euro-Straßenfeger  
Du brauchst kein’ Psychologen nur jeden Tag ’nen Träger  
Hör auf den Papst, treib nich’ ab, schick die Kids in’s Heim  
Wer ein guter Freund ist, muss die Spritze teil’n  
Geh dein Weg (Ja), leb dein Leben (Ja), sei du Selbst (Ja),  
fick deine Mutter  
Das ist mein Appell an die Ghetto-Kids:  
lasst die Skills zu Hause, bringt die Messer mit

Dein Leben ist ein Scheiß-Job doch einer muss ihn machen  
Jeder kann es schaffen, einsam und erwachsen  
Nicht reich, nicht schön, du willst, dass jeder dich kennt?  
Vielleicht fällt das Licht auf dein Viertel wenn es brennt

(There’s much to do, much too much, don’t even start  
You wanna goal in life, take a look at your father  
If you try (try) your best, you can have his spot  
and spend every morning at the bar  
You can live every day as your last  
You just have to do every day the same:  
(It’ll work, it’ll work)  
Drop out of school  
stab a gay person  
Even you can be an artist: paint a Jewish grave  
In the ghetto everyone likes you  
One-Euro-Street-Sweeper  
You don’t need a psychologist, just a social organization<sup>100</sup>  
Listen to the Pope, don’t abort, institutionalize the kids  
A good friend shares the needle  
Go your way (yeah), live your life (yeah), be yourself (yeah)  
fuck your mother  
That’s my call to the ghetto kids:  
leave the skills at home and bring your knife

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<sup>100</sup> The original is a legal term for the organizations that offer MAEs, i.e. One-Euro-Jobs.

Your life is a shit-job, but someone has to do it  
Anyone can handle it, alone and autonomous  
Not rich, not pretty, you want everyone to know you?  
Maybe the light will find your neighborhood when it burns)

A mystification occurs here in the sense that K.I.Z. is in conversation with a tradition that has consistently spoken of rapping as something opposed to the development of socially acceptable skills and good sense. To quote Blumentopf again: “und Leute sagen, wenn’s so weiter geht dann verblöd’ ich / und werd’ verrückt, aber das ist auch nicht schlecht / weil dann kriege ich auch den entsprechenden Rapstyle” (and people say if it continues like this then I’ll get dumber / and go crazy, but that’s not bad either / because then I’ll obtain the proper rap style). In other words, there is an analogy between the German MC, on the one hand, for whom working will never result in social respect given the parameters of the authoritative critical discourse surrounding hip hop and the structurally unemployed person, on the other hand, for whom a respectable career appears likewise to be impossible to achieve. Given the apparent impossibility of achieving a respectable social standing through socially sanctioned skills, it becomes necessary to achieve social standing by breaking taboos—hence the apparent regression from a sublimated pursuit of the other’s affection through a career to the oedipal pursuit of one’s mother as a sexual object. Interestingly, though, sex with the mother here is not in fact a regression: it remains sublimated insofar as one would not pursue sexual contact with the mother out of basic lust but as a matter of principle. Likewise, one wouldn’t stab a gay person because one hates gay people but because breaking a taboo (whether in terms of homophobic or anti-Semitic behavior), doing what one is not supposed to do, is precisely one’s job according to the logic of the song.

**Conclusion: “Immer weiter” (On and on and on...)**

Und ich kann nicht, das sein was ihr wollt das ich bin,  
wenn das hier vorbei ist, habe ich mit dem Teufel ein Kind.

(And I can't be that which you want me to be  
when this here is over, I'll have a child with the devil)

-JAW "Vorgespräch" (Prelude) [2010]

Whether "Rapper's Delight" was the first song in which the phrase "on and on and on" appeared, I'm not sure. There it refers to the beat that "don't stop till the break of dawn" and hence also the party, which the beat propels. Just as this line appears in countless other songs (in hip hop and R&B), so does an equivalent in German. "Immer weiter" (literally, always further) can be taken as a rough translation of "on and on and on" into the German context. But there it has less the connotation of a party than the necessity to keep going even when one lacks the motivation or justification to continue. "Es muss weiter gehen, immer weiter" (It must go on, on and on), as Dendemann of Eins Zwo says in "Undsoweiter" (And so on), an entire song devoted to the theme. He also poses there perhaps the quintessential question for the German MC: "wie mach' ich anderen Mut, wenn ich selbst nicht mehr habe?" (How can I give others courage [or motivation to carry on], when I don't have any more myself?). His answer is more or less that his audience should appropriate "and so on" as a principle for guiding their actions: "Undsoweiter machen im Zweifelsfalle" (when in doubt, go on and on).

I have argued that the lack of motivation on the part of the German MC is directly linked to his social standing as a producer of illegitimate culture. While the critical discourse surrounding hip hop in the greater German context didn't invent the cultural hierarchy that separates dominant and dominated cultural products, it has reaffirmed that hierarchy in explicit terms. Consequently, the German MC lacks a socially sanctioned career along with the entire set of practices that such a norm implies. Further, much of the hip hop that I have discussed above attempts to come to terms with this lack by supplementing it with an alternative subjective position (that of the *Versager* or deadbeat). It is of course no wonder that the result generally

entails forms of productivity that run counter to forms of sociality accepted in the given context. To the extent that the cultural framework that I have sketched here—whereby a cultural elite establishes norms for the proper practice of MCing, which reaffirm the established cultural hierarchy such that any number of MCs cannot orient their practice on these norms—to the extent that this framework is stable, there will be no end to the proliferation of aberrant cultural productions that at once reject and feed off of this pressure. It appears that it must go on, on and on. The artist that I quoted in the epigraph to this conclusion serves to prove the point insofar as his lyrics depict horrifically violent scenes. Interestingly, he clearly spent as much time reading Nietzsche as he did studying the work of Eminem. Not only do I find his beats to be enjoyable, then, his lyrics are more philosophically intriguing than the work of most hip hop critics. As a fan, I can't seem to lose.

What a pity, mein Lohn ist shitty.  
(What a pity, my pay is shitty.)

Für das Geld machen wir den Scheiß nicht mehr...weg!  
(For that money, we're no longer taking this shit...away!)

-Slogans of the 2009 Shit Strike

## Conclusion

Of all the curiosities that surrounded the Working Opportunities with Additional Cost Compensation, the Shit Strike was definitely one of the more curious. Here is how the Shit Strike Committee explained their strike that took place in the early part of summer 2009:

Around 1 May 2009, those occupied in the outpatient care and service sector began a nationwide shit strike—a conspicuously smelly sign against the continuing devaluation of their work. With the refusal to dispose of the daily accumulating shit quietly, the shit-flood was directly routed to those agents who—as a unique interest-cartel—manage to press the entire care sector into the low-wage sector. For a month, feces tubes, which are available in every pharmacy, were filled and sent off with shit: to private and public nursing service providers, charities, politicians, temp agencies, procurers of cheap foreign care labor, and to many others also responsible for the conditions in the care sector.

And the form letter that was to accompany the tubes had this to say about who was sending the package:

We work with one of the countless small private nursing service providers, with one of the non-profit organizations or with the huge parochial agencies, or we are hired directly by the person receiving the care in the scope of their personal budget; perhaps, however, we are also forced to allow ourselves to be placed by a temp agency in the care sector or we were required to work in this sector by the Federal Employment Agency as 1-Euro-labor (MAE-er); we work as migratory cheap care personal in so-called resident model and must for a few hundred Euro a month be ready to serve there at any time; or we work without almost remuneration at home caring for one of our own dependents.

Packages were sent to well over 100 recipients including Klaus Wowerweit (SPD and the mayor of Berlin), Angela Merkel (CDU), Guido Westerwelle (FDP), and numerous other politicians and organizations. As the *taz* reported, “other recipients are the Employment Agencies, because placing the unemployed into the care sector within the parameters of a ‘Working Opportunity with Additional Cost Compensation’ (MAE) increases the pressure on wages” (*taz*, 30 April 2009).

Historically, similar kinds of work in Germany had precisely the opposite connotation. As Nancy Reagin argued in *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870-1945*, cleanliness was next to Germanness.

During the nineteenth century the model of domesticity that developed among the German bourgeoisie along with its attendant symbols and practices—sparkling white, pressed linens; immaculate rooms; the Sunday roast and cake; a carefully kept household account book; a generally labor-intensive style of housekeeping; and the German Christmas tree—became a yardstick for measuring other nations’ households and for defining German identity through domestic contrasts. A particular approach to domesticity, which had begun as a project of class formation, now became a commonplace vehicle for the articulation of national identity. (2007, 54)

The point of the Shit Strike was to call attention, though, to the manner in which care work has been degraded and devalued and it’s not difficult to see how this shift has occurred. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, domestic work was linked to a particularly bourgeois lifestyle where female labor in the home was valued as a sign of financial success and stability insofar as it implied ownership of a sizeable home and the lack of a need for the wife-mother to enter into wage labor. Care work—as the Shit Strike makes clear—has been thoroughly commodified and hence subjected to the economic pressures of the post-industrial era. In fact, sanitary and assistant work in hospitals has been one of the fastest growing areas of the low-

wage sector. The percentage of these jobs that are low wage doubled in recent years (Bosch and Weinkopf 2007, 42).

In postwar West Germany, the cooperative configuration that emerged between capital and labor set it apart from other industrialized nations and became known as the “German model.” It was particularly known for its highly-skilled, highly-paid, and highly-unionized workforce (Streeck 1997). Helmut Schmidt (SPD) famously used the German model (*Model Deutschland*) as a political slogan during his chancellorship from 1974 to 1982 (Lehmbruch 2003, 150). Given that Germany still has a higher percentage of its population involved in industrial production than any other European nation (as well as the United States), there is significant support for national identities anchored in the key characteristics of the German model. This is why it is so significant that the critical discourse that solidified around welfare reform in Germany named the workfare positions One-Euro-Jobs: the name functions as an overdetermined symbol for all that might threaten not only an important element of national identity but also the values associated with it: One-Euro-Jobs are anathema to the German model.

Assuming that the German model functions as an important ideological construct whereby social antagonisms are elided in favor of a focus on social partnerships that appear to be mutually beneficial (and hence constitute an “us”), then it is important to recall that Schröder specifically avoided an ideologically tinged justification for welfare reform as a strategy to circumvent the gridlock of party politics. For precisely by not situating welfare reform in a stable ideological configuration, Hartz IV became the “external” to the dominant ideology such that it—following Lefort and Yurchak as I did in chapter 2—could function as a support for the dominant ideology. Hartz IV is, in other words, the shit that critics have cleansed from the

symbolic order through the imposition of critical logics, the contours of which I sketched in reference to journalistic discussions of workfare programs. By construing workfare as forced, exploited, low-wage, and precarious work, it became possible to understand the existing low-wage sector as an effect of labor market policy and not as an effect of the social relations constitutive of the post-industrial context.

An ideological configuration in which workfare participants (and not welfare recipients as in the ideological configuration that Newt Gingrich mobilized) function as the unwilling but nevertheless destructive force that undermines “our” solidarity, poses a challenge to theories of governmentality. Scholars drawing on that body of work often assume that citizens internalize the norms supported by the official discourse of welfare reform and accordingly further behave in a manner amenable to government. In Germany, the critics of workfare developed a discourse that significantly determined the implementation of the workfare programs. This led me to reconsider the circumstances in which norms are internalized.

In chapter 3, I considered Weber’s ideal types of traditional and spirited relations to labor as two distinct subjective positionalities, i.e. two distinct ways in which the relation to productive activity and hence the social can be structured. Either a person relates to work as a means to the end of securing a particular standard of living and will, therefore, work as little as possible in order to achieve that end. Or a person will become subject to a career as an ideal whereby having a career necessitates in turn an entire set of behavioral patterns in line with its demands. On the basis of a discussion of Freud and Lacan, I argue that having a career is a matter—at the most basic psychological level—of internalizing the desire of the other. Given the ideological configuration that courses through the German workfare state, there is no reason to expect that a person would internalize its norms insofar as the workfare participant is precisely that which

isn't desired by the other, but instead is expelled as inimical to the unity of "us." Instead, the contingent benefits and other disciplinary measures of Germany's workfare state would support a traditional relation to work as a means to an end.

In chapter 4, the story of Sebastian exposed certain limits of workfare policy just as it stretched the seams of my argument. If there is a thread yet to be found, it is that Sebastian as well as numerous other workfare participants and NGO administrators often make use of the critical discourses surrounding welfare reform as they navigate the system that it created. Workfare participants generally characterize their relation to their workfare activities as straightforward means to an end: they allow one to increase one's monthly income by about 180 Euros. Given the curious emphasis on formal requirements, these workfare programs constitute an analogy to the political conditions of late socialism as described by Alexei Yurchak whereby the constative dimension of discourse (or the content of productive activity) loses importance in comparison to the performative dimension of discourse (or the formal gestures such as signing in on time at a job). This lent the "work" time of an MAE an onerous character; passing time became the primary productive activity of the workfare program.

In the final chapter, I return to the thematic discussed in the opening chapter. In chapter 1, I argue that critical engagements with the new xenophobia will remain inadequate unless the operative categories of ethnicity are expanded to include associations with productivity. For the transition from welfare to workfare in Germany reoriented public culture around issues of productivity and personal autonomy, whereby those who "willingly" pursue their professions are glorified and those forced to do menial labor are vilified for undermining national employment and wage standards. Interestingly, German hip hop artists have long since developed professional identities premised on uniting notions of leisure and style as a mode of resistance to the relentless

normative pressure to produce, contribute, and conform—and hence not as a platform to engage in conspicuous consumption of luxury goods.

Assuming that Paul Krugman is right about the vicious circle that austerity perpetuates, whereby significant decreases in state spending are thought actually to contribute to problems of debt by reducing income in general instead of encouraging circumstances that would make the repayment of debt more likely<sup>101</sup>—assuming Krugman is right about the “austerity death spiral in Europe,” difficult economic conditions will persist in Europe for the foreseeable future. A context of interminable economic crisis will allow politicians to implement radical policy change, justifying it with reference to economic imperative as much neoliberal reform has been justified. Given the relative unpopularity of the Hartz reforms in Germany, it will remain plausible to jettison the cumbersome workfare state in favor of basic income. The Hartz reforms have already more or less instituted basic income whereby persons earning less than a set wage each month (currently 600 Euros) become eligible for income subsidy similar to a reverse tax. So too, Unemployment Benefits II are already oriented around a minimum for existence. In recent years, the legal system has been inundated with cases contesting the inadequacy of benefits. Presumably those kinks will slowly be worked out and Germany will perfect the bureaucratic management of unemployment benefits oriented toward an absolute minimum for existence. The main consequence, then, of a switch to basic income would be that “challenges” to customers such as MAEs would no longer exist. Placement officers in Job Centers would be transitioned back to bean counting as it were.

While the relaxing of the workfare state’s disciplinary apparatus would be a welcome consequence for many, there would also be much lost. Income above the minimum required for

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<sup>101</sup> See Paul Krugman, “The Austerity Agenda,” *New York Times*, 31 May 2012.

existence would only be possible through black market labor for at least one million Germans,<sup>102</sup> which would carry with it the danger of losing one's benefits altogether. Job placement services would also all be thoroughly privatized rendering them even more clearly subject to market logic.

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<sup>102</sup> As of 2010, there were roughly 1,000,000 long-term unemployed persons in Germany.

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