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Hardboiled Performance and Affective Intimacy: Remediations of Racism in the Cenk Batu *Tatorte*

Claudia Breger

Introduction

In their seminal study on *Remediation*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin analyze contemporary culture in the age of digital media in terms of its “twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy” (5)—or, the simultaneous “desire to get beyond mediation” (3) and “pleasure in the act of mediation” (14). My contribution to this special issue links Bolter and Grusin’s concept of remediation to theories of performance, which have been similarly marked by diverging investments in realness or *presence*, on the one hand, and hypermediation or *theatricality*, on the other. However, I will shift the focus of investigation from Bolter and Grusin’s media-theoretical framework to one of aesthetic practice in order to identify the culturally specific work of remediation with respect to racism in contemporary Germany. As a case study for this endeavor, I discuss the mainstream TV crime series *Tatort*, and specifically the historic introduction of a Turkish German criminal investigator, Cenk Batu, who appeared in six episodes released between 2008 and 2012. In the following, I begin by introducing this culturally specific material before more fully developing my theoretical intervention.

Since its first broadcast in 1970, *Tatort* has become Germany’s most popular and influential TV crime series. Each episode usually features a team of two investigators, and the settings in which these teams operate have come to encompass almost every major German(-speaking) city.¹ The prime-time premiere of each new episode, which always airs Sundays at 8:15pm on *DasErste*, Germany’s leading public TV channel operated by ARD, not only constitutes an eagerly anticipated event for audiences wanting to follow their favorite detectives. It often also garners attention, and sometimes controversy, for tackling social and political issues.² As such, the series has developed a reputation as a major “‘seismograph’ of German sensitivities and

¹ It should, however, be acknowledged that the series has been slower to take hold in the former East, where the GDR equivalent, *Polizeiruf 110*, still maintains a TV presence with several teams. Beyond the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Vienna has also served as a *Tatort* location since the early 1970s, produced, for a time, by ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk) independently from German television. In cooperation with SF (Schweizer Fernsehen), Lucerne was added in 1990, used until 2001, and resurfaced again in 2011.

² The existing body of scholarly research on *Tatort* is still fairly limited. In addition to the specific contributions discussed below, see e.g., Mattson, Ruhl, Gräf.

mentalities, as an observer of society overall” (*‘Seismograph’ deutscher Befindlichkeiten und Mentalitäten, als Beobachter der Gesellschaft insgesamt*, Gräf 8). *Tatort*’s fictional universe has thereby also echoed the country’s slow and strained response to questions of diversity and discrimination.³ For example, in 1989, the character Lena Odenthal (Ulrike Folkerts) was introduced as the first female detective destined to become a longterm *Tatort* presence. The first episode with Odenthal, entitled “Die Neue” (The New One), foregrounded the ‘issue’ of her gender, along with that of her youth.⁴ Over the years, Odenthal’s evolving character portrait perpetuated this gender thematic by intertwining her overall butch, but at moments also rather feminine demeanor with questions about her sexuality. Odenthal’s repeated (audience-teasing) flirtation with both men and women took place against the background of Folkert’s own coming out in the late 1990s. In 1991, another innovation came with the introduction of Ivo Batić (Miroslav Nemec) as a Munich-based investigator of Croatian background. This role also notoriously foregrounded the character’s presumed difference from a German norm: even today, the *Tatort* webpage characterizes Batić as displaying an “impulsive” style and “Mediterranean temperament” vis-à-vis the more reflective personality of his “homegrown” Bavarian colleague Franz Leitmayr (Udo Wachtveitl) (see “Batic und Leitmayr”). While such stereotyping techniques are notorious, they have been effective in getting mainstream audiences accustomed to a degree of diversity among characters in their favorite TV crime show. Both Odenthal and Batić continue to be featured on the program, and by 2013, a majority of the detective teams have come to include female investigators with a range of gendered self-presentations.

However, inclusivity with respect to race, culture, and religion has proven to be more challenging to embrace in the German context than issues of gender identity, especially when it comes to the country’s Muslim minorities. To be sure, the new century brought about a belated and internally fraught rethinking of hegemonic concepts and practices of culture, ranging from the reform of citizenship legislation in 2000, to Europe-driven anti-discrimination measures, to the celebration of new multicultural identities on the soccer field (see Stehle and Weber). However, these encouraging developments have been counteracted by the waves of transnational Islamophobia during the “War on Terror,” which dovetailed with more local legacies of exclusion in Germany. Over the past decade, German public discourse has been marked by a disturbing intensification, and mainstreaming, of anti-Muslim racism.⁵ In this social climate, questions of Muslim immigration and identity have been variously thematized in *Tatort* episodes, including the controversial 2007 episode “Wem Ehre gebührt” (To Whom Honor is Due), written and directed by Angelina Maccarone,

³ For an empirical overview of *Tatort*’s contributions to the topic of migration, see Ortner.

⁴ Technically, *Tatort*’s pioneering female detectives should be identified as Kommissarin Buchmüller (Nicole Heesters) in the 1970s (with three episodes based in Mainz) and Odenthal’s immediate predecessor Kommissarin Wiegand (Karin Anselm) in the 80s (with eight episodes in Baden-Baden). However, both of Odenthal’s predecessors had far more traditional character profiles (see Gräf 229–240).

⁵ I use the notion of racism here with respect to its contemporary articulations, which have tended to rely more explicitly on culture and, increasingly, on religion than on biology. Nonetheless, they continue to draw on images of physical difference and, recently again, even genetics (see, in particular, Sarrazin’s bestseller and the subsequent debate).

which developed the theme of *Ehrenmord* (Honor Killing) into a plot about the discovery of incest and murder in an Alevite family.⁶

For my purposes, this particular episode gains significance for introducing the actor Mehmet Kurtuluş to the *Tatort* series. Kurtuluş, who became widely known for his film roles in Fatih Akin's *Kurz und schmerzlos* (1998), Doris Dörrie's *Nackt* (2002), and Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (2004), was cast as a case-specific co-investigator matched with the Hannover-based Charlotte Lindholm (Maria Furtwängler) who uniquely remains the only female investigator in the *Tatort* universe without a permanent male partner.⁷ After this one-time stint in the episode "Wem Ehre gebührt," Kurtuluş was offered a serial role as Hamburg-based detective Cenk Batu, the first 'regular' Turkish German detective on *Tatort*. The title of Batu's first episode, "Auf der Sonnenseite" (On the Sunny Side, 2008), arguably plays off Akin's 2007 film *Auf der anderen Seite* (released in English as *The Edge of Heaven*, but literally "On the Other Side;" see Plumly 4). This circumstance provides the first signpost for my argument that remediations between film and television are of crucial relevance for the episodes starring Kurtuluş. But these remediations go beyond cross-referencing actor profiles, and they propel both aesthetic and cultural innovation. In this paper, I explore the major TV event constituted by the introduction of *Tatort*'s first Turkish German investigator, taking into consideration the fact that, despite stellar reviews by professional critics, Cenk Batu was not to become an enduring presence in the *Tatort* series, being killed off in his sixth episode and having since been replaced. This outcome, one perhaps precipitated by lingering audience discomfort as expressed in comparatively modest viewership ratings (see Weiss), would seem to indicate that these episodes with a Turkish German detective were perhaps *too* innovative in both content and form for mainstream television consumption at this particular historical moment.

In fact, Cenk Batu never quite qualified as a 'regular' detective, insofar as he held the unique status of an undercover agent in the *Tatort* universe.⁸ The episodes with Batu nonetheless adhere to the usual structure of investigator teams in *Tatort*: Cenk is paired with his boss Uwe Kohnau (Peter Jordan) in a configuration that plays out in ways quite typical of the series. But as an undercover investigator, Batu spends significantly more screen-time being a 'lone fighter' than do most of his *Tatort* colleagues. He is a definitive action star in these episodes, embodying clichéd masculine heroism by virtue of his tall and muscular figure. As such, Kurtuluş's acting and the characterization of Batu more fully tap into the topoi associated with the hardboiled genre than do most *Tatort* detective teams. As Arlene Teraoka has suggested, the hardboiled genre has in fact been virtually absent from the mainstream tradition of German detective fiction, which instead comprises an imaginative universe dominated by "state-employed police inspectors" (267). Though technically also a state employee, the undercover agent Batu displays the hardboiled "individualism and self-reliance," rebellious spirit, "hard language, violence and

⁶ In response to protests by the German Alevite community (see Gräf 9), the episode was removed from the program—that is, it is no longer in the repertoire for the usual repeat broadcastings of older episodes in slightly less prime-time programming slots.

⁷ Casting prominent figures from the German film world in *Tatort* is by no means new or unique. One prime example is the famous actor Manfred Krug, who maintained a long-term second career as the Hamburg-based detective Stoever (1986–2001) following his emigration from the GDR.

⁸ Gräf, to be sure, discusses the theme of undercover investigation as a novelty in the *Tatort* world of the nineties. The prime example he gives, however, is the Stoever/Brockmüller episode "Undercover-Camping" where this feature is situational rather than permanently attached to the detective team (306). I am not aware of any actual undercover agent preceding Batu in the *Tatort* universe.

street smarts” (266) associated with the quintessential anti-hero. As I will demonstrate, however, the portrayal of Batu also critically reworks these topoi, and the episodes that feature him can thus be understood as a performative remediation of Germany’s ongoing debates about Muslim immigration. Indeed, these episodes refashion and perhaps even “reform” (see Bolter and Grusin 59) post-September 11 anti-Muslim culturalisms that have permeated the country’s cultural imaginary not least via an established, cross-media tradition of stereotyping Turkish German “thug” masculinity (see Teraoka 270).

More specifically, I argue that the episodes featuring Batu attain their innovative contours at the intersection of two different concepts of *performance*. As I have spelled out elsewhere (Breger 2012), theory and criticism in recent decades have been informed by two divergent, and partly incompatible, models of performance. In a nutshell, performance has participated in the “language” of both “theatre’s fakery” and of the “authentic,” and thus “performance” has served as a metaphor for the vicissitudes of representation, on the one hand, and as a means for “ground[ing] the ‘real’” in a production of presence, on the other (Jackson 14, 37).⁹ The model of performance as theater has long been developed into a form of cultural critique, from Bertolt Brecht to Judith Butler and beyond. Influential in particular during the 1990s, this notion of performative theatricality became associated with semiotics and poststructuralism, and it is precisely what Bolter and Grusin credit with the insight that “all media are at one level a ‘play of signs’” (19). It also resonates with their characterization of hypermediacy’s often “playful or subversive attitude” (34). As developed in performance studies, this model of performance invites us to conceptualize Batu’s appearance in *Tatort* as a form of “ethnic drag” (Sieg) that theatricalizes racial identity in the frame of the television detective genre.

As I detail below, such a reading is, in fact, appropriate but can only capture part of the innovative cultural work enacted by these episodes. The Batu episodes also gain provocative power through their participation in a recent trend in visual media aimed at generating presence, or presence effects. The underlying model of performance here has its history in avant-garde notions of performance beyond the theater, and it has shaped phenomenological definitions of performance, such as Fischer-Lichte’s concept of performance as the “generation of materiality” grounded in the “actors’ bodily being-in-the-world” (75, 82). Associated with the desire for immediacy that Bolter and Grusin trace from the Renaissance perspectival system via André Bazin’s cinematic realism to the “sense of presence” offered by virtual reality’s “first-person point of view” (22; cf. 24, 26), this model of performance has recently gained in cultural influence again. Whereas Bolter and Grusin, at the turn of the millenium, suggested that “the desire for immediacy” had become “a somewhat embarrassing (because undertheorized) tradition” (30), the new century has witnessed its comeback in phenomenologically grounded scholarship as well as in dominant cultural and aesthetic trends (for detail, see Breger 2012). Participating in these trends, the Batu episodes of *Tatort* not only initiate a (theatrical) comedy of identity but also develop an aesthetics of presence and sensation that draws audiences affectively close—for some, perhaps too close—to the figure of a Turkish German hero. In investigating the cultural productivity of this interplay between theatricalization and the generation of presence, my contribution to this issue

⁹ The notion of a *Production of Presence* is, actually, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s whose primarily philosophical intervention resonates with phenomenological concepts of performance.

facilitates dialogue among diverging traditions of performance scholarship, associated paradigms of phenomenology, affect studies, and narrative theory.

Theatricalizing Racialized Identities

Kurtuluş first gained public attention for his performance of “thug masculinity” in Akin’s *Kurz and schmerzlos* (1998). Ten years later, the first *Tatort* episode with Cenk Batu, “Auf der Sonnenseite,” seemed to pick up where Kurtuluş’s previous character role left off. The very first on screen-dialogue at the outset of the episode introduces Cenk in the midst of an undercover investigation of a syndicate of white-collar criminals, as his contact informs him about his acceptance into the inner circle. When Cenk asks how this was accomplished, the contact replies that he told them “the truth” (*die Wahrheit*), namely that Cenk was an “unscrupulous amoral asshole” (*skrupelloses amoralisches Arschloch*). Yet the following scene suggests the exact opposite when Cenk fails the crime ring’s loyalty test because he is not willing to kill a presumed traitor who is portrayed as being thoroughly unsympathetic. The situation turns out to be a setup: the gun Cenk was given for the murder would not have gone off anyway—which means that according to the logic of the episode, he could have safely played along. Although he did not know that the gun was not loaded and, thus, was perhaps only exercising professional caution, Cenk’s facial expression and hurried intonation convincingly suggest he is actually telling the truth with the assertion: “I can’t do that” (*Ich kann das nicht*). Ridiculed as a “complete idiot” (*Vollidiot*), the crushed Cenk returns to his apartment and turns on his stereo, which greets him with a schmaltzy Chris de Burgh love song. Cenk mutters “softy” (*Weichei*), attributing this musical choice to his boss Uwe, who, during his undercover absence, had been feeding Cenk’s fish, the only other living, if disinterested, beings in Cenk’s stylish city apartment. Of course, in this fleeting comic moment, the swift deflection of any association with sentimentality merely underlines Cenk’s need to reconstruct his hardboiled masculinity after the blow it received at the very outset of his character’s career on the series. The shooting scene will continue to haunt him in his dreams.

As this introductory sequence indicates, the role of an undercover investigator provides a perfect frame for engaging issues of identity, gender, and race in the serial television format. In a cultural context in which the post-September 11 debates around Muslim identities were heating up to feverish levels in the German public sphere, the Batu episodes developed this engagement in explicitly racialized terms. After Cenk’s initial failure in the role of an Alsatian, he is then asked to take on the identity of a minor Turkish German criminal—an identity that is based on the naturalized ethnic background of both the TV character and the actor. Importantly, however, the performance of this identity comes far from naturally to Cenk. Not only are his Turkish language skills less than satisfactory, he also shows definite signs of resistance to the new assignment. To make matters worse, he perceives this assignment as a professional demotion to a marginal social space in comparison to that of investigating ‘white’ collar crime—a notion that aptly dramatizes the structures of racialization at work here. To be sure, the episode’s twist is that the new assignment will eventually enable Cenk to successfully solve the first case, since, as it will turn out, the white German criminals he initially pursued were making it their business to trick poor Turkish Germans into making fraudulent real estate transactions.

For the moment, Cenk is charged with a presumably unrelated task: that of getting to know a Turkish German adolescent during the latter's hospital stay. The adolescent, Deniz, is no less disaffected by Cenk's arrival in his hospital room than is Cenk himself, and quips: "Are you lumping people together here by race?" (*Legt ihr hier nach Rassen zusammen?*) When Cenk later repeats that comment for the diegetic purposes of bonding, the repetition serves an additional extradiegetic function of foregrounding the remark's analytical dimension. In this way, the dialogue explicitly exposes how Cenk's re-assignment is grounded in the presumed significance of race. Similarly, in the fifth episode, Batu grudgingly accepts the job of investigating a Muslim terror cell for which a German FBI (BKA) officer insists that he is "exactly the right man" (*genau der richtige Mann*)—not least by virtue of a purported physical resemblance to the Turkish terrorist he is supposed to impersonate, a resemblance undetectable to anyone but the officer. Racialization is foregrounded even more emphatically in a later conversation from this same episode, when an unsympathetic blond BKA psychologist repeatedly conflates Cenk with his undercover identity while lecturing him about what the available "scientific literature" (*Fachliteratur*) has to say about "men like you" (*Männer wie Sie*). Only Cenk's annoyed question as to what exactly she means by "men like you" forces her to specify: "the man you embody" (*den Mann den Sie verkörpern*). Between these conversations with two BKA agents, Cenk embarks on an uncharacteristic drinking spree in defiance of his assignment as a fundamentalist. In a bar, he meets Gloria, who will become his major love interest. When she speculates as to his possible profession, she comes up with "actor" (*Schauspieler*).

If such moments of dialogue function to theatricalize racial identity, what precise effect do they aim to produce? In denaturalizing race, do the Batu episodes actually succeed in undoing its significance? Over the last several decades, the model of exercising cultural critique by theatricalizing performance has been significantly amended and demythologized—if not altogether robbed of its theoretical caché—not least through a growing recognition of the notoriously unstable and context-dependent reception of this type of masquerade among diverse audiences. Even Judith Butler has qualified her early optimism about the denaturalizing power of performance, specifically with respect to discourses of race, emphasizing that hateful "contexts inhere in certain speech acts in ways that are very difficult to shake" (*Excitable Speech* 161). As I have argued elsewhere, these insights on *context* are crucial but they need to be supplemented by closer attention to the *text* in question, be it linguistic or audiovisual. In effect, the specific configuration of identity markers in a text should be assessed within their narrative context—in my present analysis, a *Tatort* episode. Importantly, I understand "narrative" as designating not only plot, character, or the process of ideological suture—as it conventionally does in film and media studies. Instead, I define the concept of *narrative* through a broader notion of simultaneously semiotic and experiential worldmaking, and I consider this concept to cover various elements of film form, including dialogue, acting, mise-en-scène, editing, and music. All of these elements contribute to audiences' responses, even though they can never guarantee consonant results.¹⁰

My argument here is that the Batu *Tatort* episodes are, in fact, fairly consistently configured in critical ways at the level of narrative form. Again and again, these episodes expose Batu's recurring racialization as a matter of *racism* rather than of any essentialized concept of *race*, whether through situational encounters with

¹⁰ For more detail, see Breger (2012) as well as Breger (forthcoming).

outrageously racist colleagues or through the overall assembly of their worlds. For example, in Episode Five, the aforementioned blond psychologist from the Federal Crime Unit keeps provoking Cenk by disdainfully characterizing his distance from fundamentalist Islam as indicative of a lack of “spirituality.” The critical stance of the series’s discourse toward her remarks is made explicit when she lapses and completely identifies Batu’s assignment in the role of a terrorist with his Turkish German body: “ultimately, this is about *your* culture, Mr. Batu” (*letztendlich geht es ja um Ihre Kultur, Herr Batu*). This identification causes Cenk to laugh her off and walk out on her—although not before calmly telling her: “What I am learning here has nothing to do with spirituality, least of all with Islam” (*Was ich hier lerne, hat nichts mit Spiritualität zu tun, geschweige denn mit dem Islam*). The episode as a whole supports Cenk’s response and works against stereotypes by casting white German converts in the main terrorist roles and by contrasting their radicalism with the moderate, law-abiding religiosity of the immigrant *Imam* at the mosque.

To be sure, these insistent interventions into contemporary racist discourses occur within a narrative frame that seems to continuously spin the wheels of identity thematics. After all, the role assignments Batu has to fight off his body do constitute the plots of these episodes. In this sense, even consistently reconfiguring racist discourses in critical ways cannot undo the following structural dilemma: the refashioning of tropes also contains an element of “homage” (Bolter and Grusin 49). As Linda Hutcheon argues, postmodern parody, as one of the most prominent techniques of theatricalizing performance, amounts to a “[d]ouble-coded politics:” since citation always implies repetition, such performance “both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies” (101).

Voyeurism and Surveillance?

With this paradoxical nature of postmodern parody in mind, let me acknowledge and discuss the more politically critical readings of the Batu episodes advanced by other scholars. In the recent anthology *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium*, Berna Gueneli references a scene from the first Batu *Tatort* episode, “Auf der Sonnenseite,” that portrays our undercover hero in the shower. In the wider context of the voyeuristic exoticization of ethnically marked masculinities that she maintains prevails in contemporary German cinema, she observes that “revealing different perspectives of his naked body” serves to foreground, simultaneously, his “vulnerability and attractiveness” (136–7). Gueneli regards this bodily exposure as more “gratuitous to plot development” than that included in Fassbinder’s canonical *Angst essen Seele auf* to which she compares it (136). In the tradition of Mulvey’s seminal analysis of cinematic voyeurism, Gueneli interprets this shower scene as well as scenes at the public pool where Cenk regularly works out while also covertly meeting with Uwe, as symptomatic of the “iconic function of sexualized ethnic masculinities in contemporary German film and television” (137). While acknowledging the significance of the Batu *Tatort* episodes in “normalizing ... ethnic backgrounds on German screens,” Gueneli concludes her brief analysis by suggesting “the price paid for ethnic normalization of filmic characters is the continuation of overt physical sexualization” (144).

In a more detailed discussion of “Auf der Sonnenseite,” Vanessa Plumly has developed a similar argument, but one framed in terms of “surveillance as observation

and desire” (25).¹¹ For Plumly, the Batu episodes perform a sort of racial profiling by subjecting the protagonist, in contrast to *Tatort*'s white German detectives, to “constant supervision and visibility” (19). In part, this effect is inscribed in Cenk's character portrait itself: Uwe must always electronically keep track of his undercover agent. Preemptively containing the virtual “deviance” of Cenk's “ability to perform multiple identities” through the omnipresence of surveillance (19–20), the episodes, according to Plumly, further objectify Batu by allowing viewers to govern his body visually through their “penetrations of Batu's private sphere” (25) in the shower and at the public pool.

Plumly's point about the structural significance of surveillance for these episodes is well taken, and I would suggest that it can be integrated into my own argument as a crucial element of the racist configuration that the Batu *Tatort* episodes are theatricalizing. At the same time, I do not think that these interpretations hold up overall. To a degree, the detective as spectacle has been a long-established feature of the *Tatort* genre, one not only associated with female and ethnic minority detectives, but also with white male detectives. While Gueneli concedes that “Duisburg's cult detective Horst Schimanski (1981–91), played by Götz George, a sex symbol of German cinema since the 1960s,” was depicted shirtless even more frequently than was Batu in his first episode, this “exception” (143) actually constitutes part of a broader spectrum of viewing pleasures invited by different detective team portrayals.¹² Although hardly in their masculine prime, the long-term (now-retired) Hamburg team of Stoeber (Manfred Krug) and Brockmüller (Charles Brauer) (1984–2001), for example, was not exactly left with an intact private sphere, either: the theme of their sexuality was developed in a predominantly comical mode and involved constant jokes about their eating habits as well as about the homosocial/homoerotic dynamic between them.

In theoretical terms, this twofold positioning of the detective, as both subject of action and object of the gaze, arguably constitutes a way of dramatizing his or her generic borderline positioning, which hovers between service to the law and its heroic transgression. In some respects, detective masculinities thus function in analogy to the frontier masculinities exemplified by the cowboys of the Western genre (see Teraoka 267). Of the latter, Richard Dyer has famously maintained, the “instability at the heart of the representation of whiteness” operates as an ideology “founded on compelling paradoxes” (39). Insofar as white male heroes are constituted as heroes solely by virtue of the metaphorical ‘darkness’ of sexuality and violence that distinguishes them against the ‘pale’ background of the law, the visual display of their muscular bodies in adventure genres simultaneously affirms and threatens their “legitimacy that is always risked by its exposure” (147). The extensive scholarly debate on Mulvey's canonical “Visual Pleasure” essay, now broadly acknowledged to have been conceptually reductive, has similarly revealed that the workings of spectacle were never as binary as postulated either by Mulvey or by the wholesale application of her concepts within critical race studies. In short, spectacularization is not exclusively the domain of feminine and/or racialized ‘others’ (see, e.g., Neale).

Returning to my discussion of Cenk, the shower scene addressed by Gueneli does contain at least one shot rather conspicuous in Mulveyian terms, namely the one that shows him right after his shower. Cenk is already clothed again in jockey shorts, but

¹¹ With thanks to Vanessa for sharing this work-in-progress.

¹² To be sure, Schimanski was also initially introduced as an outsider to the *Tatort* universe, based on his (lower) class presentation, as Gräf observes (174, 260). Since then, however, Schimanski has arguably become a truly iconic figure for the series as a whole.

the camera arguably fetishizes his hip region as he walks into the frame. Overall, however, the scene suggests a very different interpretation to me. It takes place during



Cenk's exploration of the apartment assigned to him for his undercover Turkish identity and, thus, functions as part of a sequence inviting the viewer to focus on his visible alienation from those signifiers of stereotypical Turkishness purposely planted there as part of his undercover identity. I would suggest that, as the camera follows him in exploring that strange place, the sequence decidedly aligns viewers with Cenk's perspective through the slow, melancholic, even reflective music and the poetic quality of the images—the low contrasts, slow superimpositions, and the impressionist effect of the framing through the shower's glass wall. Also, the scene opens with a quasi-subjective shot (from below) onto the showerhead, before the ensuing transitions from medium shot to close up (via superimposition) and extreme close ups (as the camera zooms in) center the viewer's attention less on Cenk's body than, in the visual language of cinema, on his thoughts.

A First-person Aesthetics of Sensation

My reading of Cenk's shower scene does not deny that the staging of this scene invites desire along with identification or empathy,¹³ likely imbricating all these responses. However, rather than visually reinforcing Cenk's supposed "otherness," I would argue that these narrative techniques produce what was perhaps the most provocative aspect of the Batu episodes against the background of dominant German

¹³ My use of this terminology reflects my syncretic combination of competing cognitive and psychoanalytic accounts. Cognitivists tend to distinguish between *empathy* (as a mode of "central alignment" or "feeling with") and *sympathy* ("acentral alignment" or "feeling for") (Smith, "Altered States," 36). However, it is precisely in the spirit of the cognitivist goal of increasing the specificity of formal analysis that I distinguish between different degrees of acentral alignment, some of which are better described as empathy in the sense of "feeling with." For forms of central alignment, I prefer the psychoanalytic notion of identification for its emphasis on the operation's potential effects on the viewer's own identity or orientation. I am aware that my use of both cognitive and psychoanalytic vocabulary in conjunction with that of affect studies implies yet another potentially provocative theoretical bridging operation, but I hope to explain it in this section.

racialization patterns—namely, their highly experimental *first-person aesthetics of sensation*. In other words, the episodes' cinematography, editing, and soundtrack closely align the audience with Cenk to elicit a range of “intimate” affective transactions with the Turkish German undercover protagonist.

Critics have enthusiastically commented on this aesthetics of sensation: the “realist” effect of viewers' alignment with Batu's non-sovereign perspective (Tittelbach, “Alles sichtbar”); the episodes' “modern making” (*moderne Machart*); their “abrupt cutting” (*abrupten Schnitte*, Kruse); and their “songlike” composition with its atmospheric, “breathhtakingly pulsating rhythm” (*atemberaubend pulsierenden Rhythmus*, Tittelbach, “Die Ballade”). As argued above, these cinematic techniques produce an aesthetic that is performative in a very different sense than is the theatricalization of identity I have focused on so far. They create “presence” (effects) consonant with phenomenological definitions of performance along the lines of Fischer-Lichte's “generation of materiality,” which is grounded in the actors' bodies and, as she emphasizes, exercises “an immediate sensual effect on the audience” (93, 75, 94). While Fischer-Lichte's performance theory insists on liveness as a necessary condition for such a production of presence, phenomenological film theory has analogously conceptualized the possibility for film images and sounds to (synaesthetically) arouse audiences through the means of a “cinema of sensation.”¹⁴

By inviting this form of sensorial participation, the *Tatort* Batu episodes strikingly embed their discursive theatricalizations of contemporary debates on Muslim identity in a viewing experience not traditionally associated with such forms of cultural critique: Brechtian-Butlerian distanciation is replaced by, or, better yet, becomes intertwined with, affective intimacy. To be sure, this dichotomy of distance and intimacy is avowedly a bit facile to begin with. Even Brecht himself was never quite as opposed to emotion as his critics presumed (see, e.g., Smith, “The Logic”). Likewise, concepts of performance as critical theatricality have rarely ever drawn exclusively on tropes of distance, instead usually imbricating them with elements of intensity, as exemplified in notions of hyperbole. However, the opposition between presence–affect and theatricality–distanciation has structured much critical discourse,¹⁵ and I find it helpful also for mapping broader trends in contemporary culture. As suggested above, I argue that in both artistic production and scholarship, the “postmodern” aesthetics of critical theatricality has been displaced by an overall re/turn to presence, immediacy, and affect in the 2000s (2012, 43ff). In contemporary cinema culture, these trends can be variously detected in the renewed (postclassical) Hollywood “cinema of attractions,” in the increased popularity of a cinema of sensations also among independent, transnational productions, as well as in experimental returns to a phenomenological method.¹⁶

As indicated, my claim is that the Batu *Tatorte* attain their provocative contours through the ways in which they participate in these cinematic trends without sacrificing the discursive (e.g. semiotic, deconstructive, etc.) critique of racist regimes of identity against which influential phenomenological performance and affect

¹⁴ See Sobchack; cf. Dyer, Shaviro (1993). While Sobchack strives to provide a theoretical foundation for the idea that cinema as such is a “cinema of sensation” (57), I am more interested in outlining the uses of specific techniques in specific contexts, or the contours of a contemporary cinema of sensation.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Fischer-Lichte's distancing of her approach from Butler and Brecht (28, 213).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Strauven; King; Shaviro (1993); Shaviro (2010); Marks; Podalsky; Breger (2012), 227ff, 249ff. For the intermedial context at stake here, the aesthetics of reality TV is another link to be explored (Weber).

theories have positioned themselves.¹⁷ As I have argued in turn, these theoretical dichotomies do not actually hold up. Among the renewed conceptualizations of presence in twenty-first century theory, those attempting to bypass the role of mediation, signification, and discourse in the process of (phenomenological) perception have remained unconvincing (if not, in Bolter and Grusin's words, "somewhat embarrassing," 30; as quoted above). This is particularly true with respect to both works of art and those of entertainment, which attain their contours in a loop of communication between authors/directors, crews, and audiences.¹⁸ However, these inescapable layers of representation are certainly not primarily linguistic or all about fixity, as opposed to the presumed fluidity of sensation or affect. Rather, audiovisual media develop a multifaceted process of worldmaking that intertwines experiential and semiotic layers in a process that continuously creates and recreates signification as well as on- and offscreen (sensorial) subjectivities. Contemporary theoretical re/turns to perception and affect have proved most promising where they attend to these complexities, for example, by displacing twentieth-century paradigms of *primarily* discursive identity construction with attention to individual and collective processes of orientation, reorientation, and sometimes also "stuckness" in the (socio-historical, discursively coshaped) flows, and sedimentations, of affect (see, e.g., Ahmed; Berlant). Short of negating mediation and signification, this shift in methodological perspective can, in fact, encourage new practices of reading (or experiencing) audiovisual works: in a phenomenological spirit, we may decide to pay significant attention to presence effects, or to the visible and synaesthetically experienced processes of affective exchange, rather than quickly resorting to symbolic or "symptomatic" interpretations.¹⁹

From this angle, the Batu *Tatort* episodes embed their discursive remediations of racism in a worldmaking process that performs experiential orientations for and through their protagonist, and invites affective audience participation in them. The particular ways in which they configure these worldmaking processes certainly imply a challenge to the established *Tatort* genre, as well as to audience expectations with respect to both gender and race. As we have already begun to see, hardboiled masculinity quickly loses its clear-cut contours. In the opening of "Auf der Sonnenseite," Cenk complains about Uwe's choice of Chris de Burgh music and quickly replaces it with fast beats. At the same time, this sequence as well as the overall episode is accompanied by very gentle extradiegetic music, a soundtrack just slightly less conspicuous than Chris de Burgh in connoting "uncoolness." More generally, the episode's aesthetics of sensation emphasize affective circulations in a mood that is part contemplative, part melancholic. In foregrounding this mood, "Auf der Sonnenseite" develops emotional layers of Cenk's orientations that would have, at best, surfaced as repressed "otherness" in more traditional, identity-based developments of the hardboiled theme.²⁰

Crucial to how the Batu *Tatort* episodes evoke this mood is their foregrounding of space and set design, including various stylized shots of modernist city architecture.

¹⁷ See, again, Fischer-Lichte, on 'presence vs. representation.' In film and affect studies, Steven Shaviro and other Deleuzians have insisted on affect as a non-signifying, a-subjective quality always already exceeding the representational fixity of 'emotion' (see, e.g., Massumi, cited in Shaviro (2012), 4).

¹⁸ For detail see, again, Breger (2012), in particular 24ff.

¹⁹ See Best and Marcus's respective critique of late twentieth-century reading practices.

²⁰ On the role of mood, as an element of a film's aesthetic composition, in "disclosing" (or, as I would word it, 'making') cinematic worlds "via shared affective attunement orienting the spectator," see Sinnerbrink (148).

Imbricating themes of modern alienation and postmodern surface pleasure, these ‘foregrounded backgrounds’ provide a space for Cenk’s unfolding orientations, as he views the city from his highrise apartment, which, in contrast to the afore-mentioned stereotypical ‘Turkish’ undercover flat in “Auf der Sonnenseite,” is presented as affectively ‘his’ space. At moments, the episode’s mood achieves a quasi-expressionist quality, as when Cenk’s melancholia finds an anchor in concrete mourning following the death of the adolescent Deniz, for whom Cenk had developed brotherly feelings while on his Turkish German criminal undercover mission. A series of variously un- and refocused, superimposed memory images of the faces of Deniz and his father are projected against a flowery background decoration, which may be perceived as oriental(ist), followed by a shot of Cenk’s unevenly lit face, gazing downward/inward while wrapped in a piece of cloth that stirs associations of a veil and/or monk frock.



Of course, it is simply his swim towel. This circumstance is dramatized in the subsequent shot, presented from an extreme high angle, onto his small body on the cool tile surface of the public pool as he leaves the towel behind to jump into the water.



The scene thus stirs and arguably also plays with diverging associations. While far less explicit than the theatricalization of identity through dialogue discussed above, the aesthetics of sensual intimacy, once again, cannot undo meaning altogether. Rather, the invitation to bracket context and focus on what is “present” merely renders signification more ambiguous (see States 31). In other words, the audience is certainly not prevented from filling this space of associative possibility with inherited cultural narratives. A “symptomatic” interpretation of the scene could draw on the psychoanalytical reading of melancholia as unresolved mourning to speculate that the encounter with Deniz has shaken Cenk’s earlier repression of his “own” Turkish tradition, which had sealed him into a modern—and, according to culturalist projections, Western—condition of alienation. (In his highrise apartment, we saw him play long-distance chess with his father in Turkey via text messaging.) By “unveiling” and jumping into the water, is Cenk reconnecting with his (feminized) cultural origins?

The overall episode, however, provides little ground for privileging that particular culturalist narrative over the other explanations for Cenk’s mood it ambiguously offers. These explanations include the genre-typical loneliness associated with the detective and, most particularly, with the undercover investigator, who, in Cenk’s case, grapples with feelings of professional failure at the episode’s outset and also never manages to connect with the potential romantic flirt in his apartment building introduced in the same episode. If anything, the emphasis on ongoing processes of orientation invited by the aesthetics of affective intimacy invites us to focus on Cenk’s (present) attachment to Deniz rather than to speculate, amidst the absence of concrete information, on Deniz as a representative of some possible past loss. Furthermore, the play with diverging associations initiated in this pool scene—which functions less to sexualize Cenk than to dramatize his affective process and vulnerability—has the potential of undoing the oppositions of gender and race. The ambiguously framed bath towel, which can be read as either a veil or a monk’s hood, superimposes associations of either femininity or contemplative masculinity in the Muslim and Christian traditions respectively. His jump into the water just as easily connotes masculinity as femininity in the specific context of the exercise pool with its dominant “hard” modernist tile surfaces. In inviting us to follow Cenk’s orientations, might the scene instead open discursively established oppositions onto a heterogeneous space of potentially shared feelings and, in doing so, reinforce a redemptive reading of the *Batu Tatort* episodes as contributing to an emphatic remediation of mainstream German racisms?

Acts of Closure

Perhaps that is too much to demand from *Tatort*. Whereas critics could not stop praising the Batu episodes, audiences appeared overly challenged by the invitation to affectively engage with their emotionally receptive hardboiled investigator. As indicated above, Cenk was killed off in his sixth episode in 2012. Since then, a new Hamburg-based team has replaced him and split his persona into Tschiller, embodied by the blond action hero Till Schweiger, and his Turkish German partner, Gümer (Fahri Yardim), known for his role in the 2011 immigration comedy *Almanya – Willkommen in Deutschland* (Almanya—Welcome to Germany). Yardim as Gümer clearly remains in the background vis-à-vis Schweiger as Tschiller, whose character portrait on the *Tatort* webpage is extensive when contrasted with Gümer’s one

sentence introduction as of December 8, 2013. If the title of the first episode, “Willkommen in Hamburg” (“Welcome to Hamburg,” March 2013) arguably presents another conscious reference to Yardim’s background in cinema, the episode does not, in my view, excel in equal measure with the comedic take on immigration history that its cinematic intertext achieved in light-heartedly stereotyping native Germans at least as much as immigrants. In this new *Tatort* series, it is Gümer who is asymmetrically stereotyped as a comically lecherous but smart computer geek now spicing up the pale background role of Uwe, Batu’s boss. Despite the implied reversal in matters of race and surveillance vis-à-vis the Batu *Tatort* episodes, I am not convinced that this configuration furthers an anti-racist “normalization” agenda in the sense previously advanced by Gueneli.

To facilitate this reconfiguration, the writers of the last Batu episode concocted a highly contrived, but not entirely inconsistent showdown. Perhaps Cenk’s fate was already sealed at the close of the fifth episode when he sets out to finally reconnect with Gloria in her boutique. (His Islamist undercover investigation had forced him to stay away following their first night together, which had been cut short by a phone call to return to duty.) Intriguingly, he wears loosely draped around his neck the same scarf she accidentally left at his place that first night, now worn in a fashionably ‘metrosexual’ way.



Cenk is accompanied by Uwe, and their dialogue foregrounds the homoerotic dimension of their working relationship—which is, again, constitutive of the genre. Uwe confesses to having been seriously afraid for Cenk and, after a moment of hesitation, Cenk mumbles a playful “come on, darling” (*ach komm, Schatz*) as he hugs Uwe. Then, however, he outrightly rejects Uwe’s dinner invitation and abandons him on the doorstep of Gloria’s boutique without any explanation. This flippant gesture anticipates the flagrant transgression of a central code of conduct in the detective genre that will cost Cenk his life in the subsequent episode: any romantic commitments that are at odds with the investigator’s heroic mission—to be undertaken in the homosocial team—must be bracketed.

In his final episode, “Die Ballade von Cenk and Valerie” (The Ballad of Cenk and Valerie), the emotionally all-too-responsive undercover investigator again chooses

Gloria over the law when a ruthless contract killer, Valerie, kidnaps and threatens to kill Gloria if Batu does not do a difficult job for her—namely, to assassinate the chancellor of Germany at the request of a group of bankers whose illegal speculation activities the politician has vowed to curtail. To be sure, Cenk tries to balance his loyalties by introducing himself, with Uwe at his side, to the chancellor as his prospective (coerced) assassin and attempting to talk the chancellor into simulating a mediatized assassination that would satisfy the kidnapper. The chancellor, however, is not willing to thus betray his voters, and under increasing pressure from the kidnapper, Cenk completely loses his composure, first sacrificing precious seconds to a crying fit and then turning to desperate violence in an effort to save his lover. As a result, he is fatally shot at the very moment he releases the chancellor from his grip, perhaps no longer merely simulated, when he sees Gloria, who has reached the scene of the showdown after successfully freeing herself from the kidnapper.

Thus summarized, the plot of this final episode is arguably irredeemably bad (see, e.g., Biazza), and disappointingly haunted by dominant cultural narratives, including the majority culture's obsession with terrorism. Nonetheless, I would suggest in conclusion that "Die Ballade von Cenk und Valerie" does deserve some attention for the way it dramatizes the decreed closure of the major TV event that the Batu episodes represent in *Tatort's* history. First, the episode does not betray, but rather intensifies the first-person aesthetics of sensation that the Batu *Tatorte*, as I have argued, stand for overall. Radically framed as a series of flashbacks from the perspective of the dying Cenk, the episode once more invites audiences to tune in affectively, if perhaps in a different mood, as Cenk's gentle emotional responsiveness turns into frightening dissolution, causing an attendant audience disorientation exemplified in the showdown space, where the viewer is aligned with Cenk's perception.

Second, this episode simultaneously breaks with the previous ones in refraining from yet again replaying the obsessive racializations that I have maintained constitute both the discursive intervention and narrative limit of the Batu episodes overall. To be sure, the episode in many ways develops a starkly dichotomous world. Written and directed by Matthias Glasner, known in particular for *Der freie Wille* (2006), it pits Hamburg's cityspace against the contract killer's hideout in nature, and Cenk's emotional weakness against her complete lack of empathy. Dramatized as a medical condition related to autism, Valerie's lack of feeling constitutes her sovereign strength even in the face of her frail, aging, and ill body. If the killer's native German blondness invites any positional coding of this configuration, it would operate through the association of whiteness, fascism, and murder in the context of a gender cliché reversal supported, on Cenk's side, by lingering stereotypes of 'oriental' emasculation—in tension, however, with the dominant tropes of Turkish "thug" masculinity that I have discussed. (Cenk's alias as a banking assistant in this final episode, "Malcolm," meanwhile better matches the latter.) Importantly, these implications remain mostly latent in this final episode. Instead of constantly foregrounding race through elaborate undercover identity portraits (the name "Malcolm" is only mentioned in passing) and ongoing banter, the concluding episode actually seems to distance Cenk from the ethnic identifications haunting him.

If this restraint enables the doomed *Tatort* hero to retain some dignity amid his crazy showdown, the third intriguing feature of this episode is that it radicalizes the Batu episodes' defiant stance towards mainstream audience tastes by departing from the realist generic formula of previous episodes. While the latter combined realist drama and expressive stylization (see Gertz), the concluding episode radicalizes not

only the previous aesthetics of performance as a production of presence, but also the reliance on performance as representational play. It moves beyond the earlier frame of racialization to dramatize the banking world in the mode of the grotesque. Abandoning the conceit of realism, the final episode cynically theatricalizes the historic loss of political agency in the neoliberal game of profit. Thus, the trader merely laughs at Uwe's belief that the chancellor's assassination was actually plotted in retaliation for his agenda of controlling the banks, and instead declares it simply a radical gamble on political chaos in the game of maximizing profit. When the bankers call Batu on his cell phone and loudly cheer him on during the showdown, promising him a share of their profits and laughing at their own jokes about only being "fair," the narrative closure thereby achieved becomes heavily tinted with a note of the grotesque. The concluding episode theatricalizes the arbitrary death sentence for Cenk Batu by taking the world around him down with him. Extradiegetically, to be sure, the larger, more conventional *Tatort* universe survived this TV event—but the Batu episodes will remain well worth watching.

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