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Points of Entanglement: The Overdetermination of German Space and Identity in *Lola + Bilidikid* and *Walk on Water*

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In recent years, writers and scholars have begun to address the issue of how Turkish-Germans, who comprise the largest national minority group in contemporary German society, can engage with Germany's past. Zafer Şenocak has noted the exclusivity of German memorial culture and pondered whether immigrants can play a formative role in the country's future while lacking access to its history (Şenocak 2000, 53). Likewise, in a series of texts, Leslie Adelson has observed the omission of Turkish-Germans from the "interpretive landscape" of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, as well as from the larger postwar German narrative (Adelson 2000, 95, 96). Criticizing the tendency to imagine a Turkish-German encounter as one across spatial (Germany/elsewhere) rather than temporal (German past/present) lines, Adelson has developed a critical grammar in order to reconceptualize the manner in which cultural contact between Germans and Turkish-Germans is represented (Adelson 2001, 246-247). Finally, Andreas Huyssen has considered the relationship between diasporic and national memory by reflecting on the question of whether Turkish-Germans can and should "migrate" into the German past. Huyssen has concluded that such a temporal migration will remain impossible so long as Germany's public memory discourse "remains fundamentally and persistently national, focused on German perpetrators and Jewish victims" (Huyssen 2003, 164).

It bears noting that this growing body of work has remained centered on the medium of literature; indeed, texts by Şenocak and other Turkish-German authors have been the foci of Adelson and Huyssen's analyses. Film scholars including Rob Burns (2006), Deniz Göktürk (1999, 2000, 2002), Barbara Mennel (2002), and Hamid Naficy (2001) have written informative and illuminating texts on Turkish-German cinema and its spatial tropes; they have largely concentrated on the tropes of enclosure, claustrophobia, and imprisonment, and they have noted a general move from a "sub-national" cinema that reinforces notions of cultural homogeneity and

authenticity to a “transnational” cinema of circulation and hybridity. However, no one has presented a sustained analysis of how films have engaged with the politics of German space and identity in the context of the country’s National Socialist past – and, more specifically, in the context of relations between and among Germans, Jews, and Turks. In this essay, I will analyze scenes from two recent films, Turkish director Kutluğ Ataman’s *Lola + Bilidikid* (1999) and Israeli director Eytan Fox’s *Walk on Water* (2004), that evoke *Berührung* between and among these groups through their use of spaces in Berlin that bear weighty historical and ideological connotations.¹

For films using spaces as a means of evoking Germany’s past in the minds of viewers, the city of Berlin serves as “fertile symbolic terrain” (Jesinghausen 2000, 79). Andreas Huyssen writes, “There is perhaps no other major Western city that bears the marks of twentieth-century history as intensely and self-consciously as Berlin. This city-text has been written, erased, and rewritten throughout this violent century, and its legibility relies as much on visible markers of built space as on images and memories repressed and ruptured by traumatic events” (Huyssen 1997, 59-60). In the following examination of scenes from *Lola + Bilidikid* and *Walk on Water*, I will consider not only how such spaces, images, and memories are evoked, but also how they are made legible in new ways, such that the terms of German space and identity become rearticulated. I will analyze scenes of neo-Nazi violence that Ataman and Fox stage in Berlin’s Olympic Stadium and in the Alexanderplatz U-Bahn station, respectively – scenes that have been inexplicably overlooked, or given mere cursory treatment, in the existing literature on these

¹ I borrow the term *Berührung* from Leslie Adelson. Inspired by Zafer Şenocak’s notion of an “entangled history of touch [*Berührungsgeschichte*] between Orient and Occident” (Adelson 2005, 107), Adelson has lobbied for a move away from the notion of *Begegnung* [encounter], which assumes “mutually exclusive collective identities” and an “absolute cultural divide” (à la Samuel Huntington’s theory of a “clash of civilizations”) (Adelson 2001, 245-246), and has adopted the term *Berührung* [touch] to “bespeak historical and cultural entanglements to which the transnational labor migration of the 1950s and 1960s has given rise in Germany” (Adelson 2005, 21).

films.² Of key interest for me will be the function of queerness and drag in these scenes, as well as the manner in which the scenes serve not only as contestations over space, but also as opportunities for the negotiation of the German body politic. Indeed, if, as scholars such as Uli Linke have argued, the space of the German nation continues to be conceptualized as a body in contemporary discourses around German identity (much as it was during the country's National Socialist era), then the spatial politics of these scenes become inextricably linked to the politics of race, nationality, gender, and sexuality.

While Ataman's and Fox's films may seem to form an unlikely pair for a comparative case study, close examination of the scenes in question will reveal profound commonalities in the directors' political and cinematic projects. As I will demonstrate, scenes from both films engage with the politics of space in contemporary Berlin, with the German body politic, and with issues of German and minority identity in the wake of the Third Reich. Notably, the two scenes' engagement with these matters is fostered not only by depictions of neo-Nazi violence, but also by the presence of gay and/or transvestite characters.³ In my analysis, Ataman and Fox deploy queerness and drag as a means of representing, mediating, and facilitating illicit forms of *Berührung* across hegemonic corporal and national boundaries. What further radicalizes (and likens) these scenes is their staging in spaces that are laden with historical and ideological connotations. Indeed, I will ultimately argue that by setting these scenes of neo-Nazi violence against gay and transvestite characters in historically overdetermined spaces, Ataman and Fox

² For literature on *Lola + Bilidikid*, see Breger 2001; Burns 2006; Cicek 2006; Clark 2006; Göktürk 2000; Göktürk 2002; Hillman 2006; Mennel 2007; Naficy 2001; and Zaimoğlu 1999. For literature on *Walk on Water*, see Dushi 2007 and Kempinski 2007.

³ It would be worthwhile to consider the acts of neo-Nazi violence against gay men and transvestites in these two scenes in the context of the films' denouements, which involve acts of retribution against (neo-)Nazi characters. Additionally, Ataman's and Fox's films could be compared to earlier films featuring gay and neo-Nazi characters, including films by Jürgen Brüning (*Er hat 'ne Glatze*), Bruce LaBruce, Michael Stock (*Prinz in Hölleland*), and Rosa von Praunheim (*Ich bin meine eigene Frau*). However, both endeavors exceed the scope of this paper.

not only rearticulate the terms of German space and identity, but also enable the formation of a German/Jewish/Turkish constellation.

Lola + Bilidikid

Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* depicts a range of Turkish-German male subjects within the space of contemporary Berlin. These subjects include gays, transvestites, and hustlers who speak German or Turkish, live with biological or constructed families, and engage in intra- and interracial romantic and sexual relations with other men. The film's central character is 17-year-old Murat, who lives in Kreuzberg with his domineering, homophobic older brother and his meek, widowed mother. Due to his homosexual desires and his Turkish descent, Murat confronts hostility both at home and from his German classmates. Murat's sense of isolation is alleviated upon establishing contact with his older brother, Lola, who was banished from the family before Murat's birth. Lola is a member of a transvestite dance troupe and is in a relationship with Bili, a macho hustler who fiercely denies his homosexuality. In addition to confronting homophobia within Berlin's Turkish-German community, these characters are also regularly harassed by Walter, Rudy, and Hendryk, three of Murat's German classmates who are coded as neo-Nazis.

Ataman stages one such scene of harassment in Olympic Stadium, site of the Summer Olympics of 1936 and the foremost example of Nazi architecture in contemporary Berlin. The scene begins on a school bus as a teacher stolidly recounts the history of the Stadium's construction to her inattentive students. As the scene progresses, Walter, Rudy, and Hendryk run off the bus upon arriving at the Olympic Stadium, holler in exhilaration, and converge near the Olympic flame bowl. Murat, who bears an interest in the blond-haired, blue-eyed Walter,

attempts to join the three, but is quickly insulted by Hendryk. After a voice on the loudspeaker orders the teens to leave the premises of the stadium, Walter tells his friends that he will first head to the bathroom. Murat follows him into the bathroom and enters a stall, and Walter soon joins him. They kiss, and Murat begins to perform oral sex on Walter. When Rudy and Hendryk unexpectedly enter the bathroom and open the stall door, Walter quickly disguises the dynamic of the scene. After kicking Murat to the ground, Rudy and Hendryk assault Murat with a series of racist and homophobic slurs, and Walter urinates on him. As the scene concludes, Murat is left alone on the bathroom floor, bleeding and covered in urine.⁴

Like Christopher Clark, whose analysis I will later cite and build upon, I would argue that by staging this scene of neo-Nazi violence in Berlin's Olympic Stadium, Ataman clearly evokes elements of Germany's National Socialist era and suggests a sense of continuity between past and present. As the scene begins, the teacher recalls the history of the Stadium's construction – the tearing down of the original one built for the 1916 Olympics (which were canceled due to World War I), as well as the construction of the new one in preparation for the 1936 Olympics: “Es war das Stadion, das seine Meinung änderte. Er konnte der Gelegenheit nicht widerstehen, ein weiteres monumentales Bauwerk zu schaffen. Beinahe 3.000 Menschen rissen das alte Stadion ab, um das neue zu bauen” [It was the stadium that changed his mind. He could not resist the opportunity to construct a further monumental structure. Nearly 3,000 people tore down the old stadium in order to build the new one]. This quote bespeaks the role of architecture within the Nazi plan – the desire to redesign Berlin and to convey Nazi political ideology through grand structures (see Jaskot 2000). Not only did the Olympic Stadium serve as a “weiteres monumentales Bauwerk” for Hitler, but the Olympic Games themselves became a

⁴ This clip can be viewed online at <http://transitjournal.blip.tv/#1911013>.

major opportunity for the dissemination of Nazi propaganda, a famous example of which is Leni Riefenstahl's two-part documentary *Olympia* (1938). Indeed, the opening of this scene in Ataman's film mirrors the opening sequence of Riefenstahl's documentation of the 1936 Olympic Games in two notable ways: Walter, Rudy, and Hendryk's run to the Olympic flame bowl parallels the final stretch of the Olympic Torch Relay (staged for the first time for the 1936 Olympics), and Rudy's triumphant pose atop the Olympic flame bowl recalls German athlete Fritz Schilgen's lighting of the flame at the opening ceremony of the 1936 Games.

While Ataman establishes clear links between past and present in this scene, he also suggests a deep sense of rupture and disconnect in and from Germany's history. Indeed, no one in the scene seems to take a conscious interest in, or a critical stance towards, the history of the Stadium – let alone National Socialism and its policies towards groups such as Jews. The scene begins *in medias res*, such that the teacher never utters Hitler's name, but only alludes to him via pronouns (Clark 2006, 568). Furthermore, the teacher's voice is dull and monotonous as she recites the history of the Stadium from her notes. Her students seem apathetic: Walter, Rudy, and Hendryk sleep in the back of the bus, two blond girls insinuate oral sex with Murat by licking their pens, and others either carry on private conversations or gaze out the bus's windows. While the Olympic Stadium looks remarkably unscathed by history, it bears a sense of desolation; in contrast to its depiction in Riefenstahl's film, the stadium here appears empty, disorderly (as evidenced by the graffiti covering the bathroom walls), and lacking in authority figures (cf. Hitler's omniscient gaze from his box at the 1936 Olympics). Indeed, authority figures seem either absent or oblivious; the teacher sits with her back turned away from her students while on the bus, and she is absent for the remainder of the scene. Furthermore, the

voice of the man on the loudspeaker who makes a vague threat to call the police (“oder ich ruf die Polizei!”) remains disembodied and ineffectual.

In the scene, Ataman skillfully articulates power dynamics between Murat and Walter, Rudy, and Hendryk through various cinematic devices. The scene contains three instances in which Murat follows Walter: out of the bus, up to the flame bowl, and into the bathroom. Additionally, Murat is positioned lower than Walter at three different instances in the scene: as he ascends the steps, as he performs oral sex, and as he is assaulted and urinated upon. Ataman often conveys this vertical hierarchy by alternating between low and high angles in shot/reverse-shot patterns. The scene contains three shot/reverse-shot structures, each both composed of and separated by seven shots: as Murat approaches Walter and his friends near the Olympic flame bowl (shots 15-21 of the scene), as Murat and Walter kiss in the stall (shots 28-34), and as Murat is assaulted by Walter and his friends (shots 41-47). When Murat approaches Walter, Rudy, and Hendryk near the flame bowl, Ataman alternates between high-angle shots of Murat and level shots of the three others. Likewise, at the end of the scene, as the three assault Murat in the bathroom, Ataman alternates between high-angle shots of Murat and either level or low-angle shots of the three.

It bears noting, however, that the scene contains a hopeful, even utopian moment in which these roles are reversed and in which the vertical hierarchy becomes leveled. After Walter follows Murat into the stall (a reverse of the aforementioned pattern), Ataman uses a two-shot to position them equally within the frame. Furthermore, as they kiss, Ataman alternates between level-angle shots in which one or the other is foregrounded within the frame. Ataman’s use of non-diegetic music (which begins as Murat enters the bathroom) contributes to the sense of tenderness at this moment. While this shot/reverse-shot pattern (shots 28-34) is the only one in

which Ataman uses level angles to depict both Murat and Walter, it is not only bookended by the other two in the scene, but also immediately followed by a shot in which Murat kneels down to perform oral sex on Walter; in this shot, Murat exits the frame as he kneels down, and Walter remains standing in the frame.⁵ Furthermore, the non-diegetic music abruptly stops as Rudy and Hendryk open the stall door and begin their verbal and physical assault on Murat.

This verbal and physical assault becomes a means for the articulation of a national(istic) German body politic – a body politic that not only recalls that of the National Socialist era, but also involves the transposition of anti-Semitic stereotypes onto a Turkish male subject. When attacking Murat, Hendryk calls him a “schwule Sau” [gay sow] and tells him to “Lauf zu dein Kebabs und erzähl ihnen, was wir mit dir gemacht haben” [Run to your kebabs and tell them what we did with you]. Rudy responds in turn, “Seine türkischen Brüder werden ihn so in den Arsch ficken. [...] Die will es auch – die Sau, die Schwule” [His Turkish brothers will really fuck him in the ass. [...] He wants that too – the sow, the fag]. Hendryk and Rudy’s use of the term “Sau” is notable here for its recollection of the longstanding anti-Semitic figure and epithet of the *Judensau*, which was revived by the Nazis during the National Socialist era.⁶ The *Judensau* is an image of Jews in vulgar contact with a large sow; in many images, they surround the animal, suckle it, and even eat its excrement (indeed, Murat’s performance of oral sex on Walter, which directly precedes this verbal attack, is a possible visual reference to the image of the *Judensau*). The transposition of this stereotype onto a Turkish subject is notable for two reasons. First, the epithet *Judensau* and its more recent variant, *Türkensau*, have been directed at

⁵ This scene distinguishes itself from scenes in the film in which German men perform oral sex on Turkish-German hustlers. In this scene, no capitalist transaction occurs, and the vertical hierarchization of Germans and Turkish-Germans is reversed. Notably, a climactic scene of the film concludes with a restaging of Murat and Walter in a bathroom stall, this time positioned equally within the frame. In contrast to the scene at Olympic Stadium (as well as the film’s numerous scenes in bathroom stalls in which German men perform oral sex on Turkish-German hustlers), this later scene lacks a marked vertical hierarchization between the German and Turkish-German characters. See also Mennel 2007, 170.

⁶ I would like to thank Uli Linke for drawing my attention to the use of this term within the scene.

the two religious groups in Germany who view the sow as unclean and impure: Jews and Muslims. Second, as Uli Linke has noted in her comparative study of fascist and postwar conceptualizations of racial alterity, racial “others” in both periods (including Jews, asylum seekers, and immigrants from countries such as Turkey) have been feminized and configured as dispensable fluids capable of both contaminating the national body and dissolving its fixed boundaries (Linke 1997). In the scene, then, Hendryk’s and Rudy’s use of the epithet “schwule Sau” perpetuates the association of feminized “others” with the abject, and Walter’s urination on Murat links Murat to toxic elements that should be driven “*raus*” from the imagined collective German body (Linke 1995).

The scene’s body politics becomes further overdetermined when considered in the context of the scene’s setting (with its obvious evocation of athleticism and corporality) and the broader ideological connotations thereof. As Uli Linke notes, “The production of death and the erasure of Jewish bodies were central to the fascist politics of race. The aim of genocide was to maintain the health of the German body politic by enforcing a strict regimen of racial hygiene” (Linke 1997, 559-560). The 1936 Olympic Games and Riefenstahl’s documentary provided opportunities for the articulation of this German body politic. In the words of Anton Kaes, Riefenstahl “perfect[ed] the analogy between the athlete’s body and the national body” in her film, such that “sports and body culture [...] bec[a]me the site where the nation could come into representation” (Kaes 2002, 67). Furthermore, Riefenstahl herself was involved in the selection of Fritz Schilgen for the lighting of the Olympic flame; his body served a model of German athleticism and corporality. Watching Riefenstahl’s documentation of the Olympic Games, one notes the manner in which athletes’ bodies become identified and strictly organized according to race, nationality, and gender. Furthermore, in the opening sequences of the two parts of

Riefenstahl's film, one observes the explicit link formed between ancient Greece and Nazi Germany through classical architecture, homosociality, and the idealization of the male body (Kiss 2002, 53).

In his analysis of this scene from *Lola + Bilidikid*, Christopher Clark writes that it “not only depicts homophobic and racist violence but embeds it in a historical context; the setting of the Olympic stadium functions to posit affinities between National Socialist ideology and the ethnic and sexual hate crimes of today” (Clark 2006, 568). I would argue that the scene functions in much more complicated, nuanced, and interesting ways than Clark acknowledges, and I would draw attention to the various forms of boundary-crossing and illicit contact either on display or implicit in the scene: between then (1936) and now (1999), between two men, between Germans and Turks, and – perhaps most notably – between Turks and Jews. Indeed, the scene's simultaneous evocation of the body politics of Nazi and contemporary Germany functions to indicate how Jews and Turks have been construed as unwanted “others” within German territory – feminized and imagined as overwhelming and contaminous fluids that must be expunged from the German body (Linke 1997). By inserting Murat, a Turkish-German character, into a space conventionally associated with Nazi Germany (and, by associative extension, with Jews), Ataman upsets the usual exclusive German/Jewish binary. Furthermore, by staging a scene of homosexual intimacy between Murat and Walter – whose white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes are prototypical Aryan features – in Berlin's Olympic Stadium, Ataman breaks with Nazi racial politics, displays the performativity of Walter's macho identity, and resignifies – and even queers – the space of the Olympic Stadium. And indeed, since the Olympic Stadium is overdetermined not only in German history, but also in German film history, Ataman's use of this space marks a symbolic intervention in both realms.

Walk on Water

While Jews thus serve as figural reference points in Ataman's representation of neo-Nazi violence against a Turkish-German character, Turkish-Germans become part of the constellation of minority subjects evoked in Eytan Fox's *Walk on Water*, a film that considers the possibility and terms of German-Jewish reconciliation. As I will demonstrate, Turks are evoked both through the protagonists' professional work and through the inclusion of Istanbul among the film's geographical "stations" (alongside Jerusalem and Berlin).⁷ The scene of neo-Nazi violence that I will analyze is staged in the Alexanderplatz U-Bahn station – a site that, like these three cities, is marked by a history of East/West division. In my analysis, the Alexanderplatz station complements the scene's thematic of national and corporal boundaries, as well as its interest in unexpected linkages between and among various minority groups.

In Fox's film, the hyper-masculine Eyal is a recently widowed Mossad agent who guides Axel, a gay German man, around Israel during a trip to visit his sister, Pia. Axel works for an organization in Berlin that assists the children of immigrants from countries such as Turkey, and Pia lives in a kibbutz in Israel. Axel and Pia's grandfather, Alfred Himmelman, is a Nazi war criminal who has lived in Argentina since the end of World War II, but who has recently disappeared. Since Pia is seeking a tour guide for Axel during his visit, and since Eyal is fluent in German (unbeknownst to Axel and Pia), Eyal is assigned to pose as the guide in order to gather information on the whereabouts of their grandfather. Eyal eventually develops a certain rapport with Axel – a rapport that is nonetheless ruined when Axel reveals his homosexuality to Eyal and has an affair with a Palestinian man. Despite the ensuing tension between the two men, Axel tells Eyal to contact him if ever in Germany; Eyal responds, "I've never been to Germany and I don't think I'll ever want to go." However, after learning that Alfred may be returning to

⁷ It bears noting that in the film's opening scene, Eyal, a Mossad agent, assassinates a Hamas leader in Istanbul.

Germany for the 70th birthday celebration of Axel's father, Eyal flies to Berlin and surprises Axel.

In the scene that I will analyze, Eyal and Axel enter the Alexanderplatz U-Bahn station, where they pass by three neo-Nazis and then encounter four drag queens whom Axel knows. After conversing with the drag queens, Eyal and Axel begin to descend a staircase to the U8 track. However, when they hear a scream from above, Eyal and Axel run up the staircase and find that the neo-Nazis are attacking the drag queens. Just as it seems that Eyal has successfully fended off the neo-Nazis, one of the three begins to run towards Eyal with a broken beer bottle in his hand. Eyal pulls out a gun, directs it at the neo-Nazi, and says, "Verpiss dich, du Arschloch, oder ich blas dir das Hirn raus!" [Fuck off, asshole, or I'll blow your brains out!]. The three neo-Nazis subsequently leave the station.⁸ In the following scene, after riding the U-Bahn in silence to Potsdamer Platz, Axel asks Eyal about his fluency in German and his reasons for bringing a gun to Berlin, and he invites Eyal to attend his father's forthcoming birthday celebration in Wannsee.⁹

This scene of neo-Nazi violence forms clear links between the National Socialist era and contemporary Germany. Eyal, for whom Germany continues to be overdetermined by the policies and actions of the Third Reich, associates the neo-Nazis' attack on the drag queens with Nazi violence against Jews. The scene contains many indications of his feeling of discomfort in the space of Berlin; for example, after passing the neo-Nazis at the entrance to the subway station, he immediately looks back upon hearing the sound of a bottle breaking. Later in the

⁸ This clip can be viewed online at <http://transitjournal.blip.tv/#1825233>.

⁹ Note the symbolic significance of the locations of Potsdamer Platz and Wannsee. Potsdamer Platz, which was bisected by the Berlin Wall, complements this scene's thematic of borders and boundaries. Wannsee is notorious for the House of the Wannsee Conference, where Nazi officials laid out their plans for the *Endlösung* [final solution]. It also bears noting that Eyal eventually decides against killing Axel's grandfather at the birthday celebration; thus, this scene of defense in the Alexanderplatz U-Bahn station serves as a displacement of the later scene in Wannsee.

scene, while pulling out the gun and directing it at the neo-Nazi, Eyal reveals his German-language fluency – a mark of his family’s ties to Germany. When Axel prods Eyal about his German fluency in the following scene, Eyal responds, “My parents spoke German. My mother was born in Berlin. She lived there until they had to move and hide. That’s how I grew up – no German products in the house, no travel to Germany, no talking about it.” Axel then asks if this motivated Eyal’s decision to bring a gun with him to Berlin, and Eyal explains, “Just before I left for the airport, I got scared. I didn’t really think it over; I just took it.”¹⁰ Eyal’s account of his mother’s forced exile from Berlin and his family’s frayed relationship to Germany becomes both a temporal referent for the scene’s spatial politics and an explanation for Eyal’s strong reaction to the neo-Nazi attack.¹¹

Since both the drag queens and the neo-Nazis remain unnamed and undeveloped, and since they never reappear in the film, one might wonder why they are introduced in this scene. I would argue that their presence must be seen in the context of the film’s engagement with national boundaries and body politics. Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas, Judith Butler has written, “If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment” (Butler 1990, 132). According to Butler, male homosexual practice, which involves unauthorized forms of corporal permeability, becomes such a pollutive, dangerous site (Ibid., 132); furthermore, drag serves to destabilize and even denaturalize the bodily boundaries along which the social order is articulated (Ibid., 137). It bears noting that this scene at the

¹⁰ Of course, since Eyal is a Mossad agent (still unbeknownst to Axel in this scene), this explanation is not entirely trustworthy. On a side note, many critics remarked upon the implausibility of Eyal’s possession of a gun in this scene.

¹¹ Notably, this scene also becomes the point where Axel and Eyal are explicitly linked through history. Since Eyal here marks himself as a member of the German-Jewish diaspora, he and Axel are now connected through their German heritage and their ties to the Holocaust. I wish to thank Jeffrey Peck for drawing my attention to this point.

Alexanderplatz station is immediately preceded by a scene in which Axel takes Eyal to a gay bar. In this scene, Eyal shows a heretofore-unprecedented openness to the topic of gay sexual practices; he displays curiosity about the dynamics of anal sex, and he expresses particular interest in the degree to which gay men are “easygoing” in terms of crossing boundaries of nationality. When Eyal and Axel encounter the drag queens in the following scene, they ask Axel about the bar, thereby linking them to this conversation about national and corporal boundaries.

Besides being associated with the crossing and confounding of boundaries, the drag queens function to convey what Marjorie Garber, in her study of the role of transvestism in cultural forms and representations, has called “category crisis” (Garber 1992, 16). In Garber’s words, “category crisis” is “a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another” – e.g. male/female, black/white, Jew/Christian (Ibid., 16). According to Garber, the figure of the transvestite thus “function[s] as a sign of *overdetermination* – a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another” (Ibid., 16; italics mine). The drag queens in this scene of Fox’s film are indeed seemingly indeterminable in terms of their race, gender, and sexuality (the three identified actors who play them – Hubertus Regout, Biggi van Blond, and Paysley Dalton – are Belgian, German, and African-American, respectively); they alternate between German and English, and immediately disregard norms of propriety as they flirt with Eyal. When Axel introduces Eyal to them as “ein Freund von mir aus Israel” [a friend of mine from Israel], one of the drag queens even switches to Hebrew while asking Eyal, “Ma nishma?” [How are you?].¹² After parting ways with the drag queens, Axel tells Eyal, “Don’t get upset; they’re really okay,” and Eyal responds, “Don’t patronize. Remember: we invented Dana International” – a reference

¹² I would like to thank David-Emil Wickström for alerting me to the use of this Hebrew phrase within the scene.

to the transsexual Israeli singer, originally named Yaron Cohen, who won the 1998 Eurovision Song Contest.

Here, the drag queens become signs of overdetermination not only because they blur a range of social boundaries, but also because of their implicit connection to another group that has signified boundary-crossing and “category crisis”: Jews. Indeed, as Garber has written, both the transvestite and the Jew can function as “a sign of the category crisis of the immigrant, between nations, forced out of one role that no longer fits [...] and into another role, that of a stranger in a strange land” (Garber 2003, 22). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were both associated with a sense of statelessness and linked to women and homosexuals (Ibid., 36). For example, in Chapter Thirteen (“Das Judentum”) of *Sex and Character* (1903), Otto Weininger characterizes the Jew as a “Grenzenverwischer” [obscurer of borders, 417] with qualities of “Formlosigkeit” [formlessness, 417], “Beweglichkeit” [mobility, 429], and an “unendliche Veränderungsfähigkeit” [unending potential for change, 429], as well as with a “Mangel an irgend welcher Bodenständigkeit” [lack of any type of rootedness, 431]. Weininger finds numerous points of “Kongruenz zwischen Judentum und Weiblichkeit” [congruence between Jewry and femininity, 429], and he asserts that “unsere Zeit” is “nicht nur die jüdischeste, sondern auch die weiblichste aller Zeiten” – a “Zeit ohne Sinn für Staat und Recht” [our time is not only the most Jewish, but also the most feminine of all times – a time without sense for State and Law, 441]. Jews were thus both coded as non-normative in terms of gender and sexuality, and associated with the *Verwischung* of traditional cultural and national boundaries – stereotypes that the Zionist movement directly counteracted.

In the context of the scene, Eyal’s act of successfully defending the drag queens against the neo-Nazis’ physical attack would seem to serve as a validation and reinscription of his

Zionist masculine identity. However, the scene is filled with indications of a transformation in Eyal's identity and of his increasing disinvestment from the Zionist project. As aforementioned, Eyal shows an unexpected and unprecedented openness to the subjects of homosexuality and transvestism, which are here associated with the crossing and obscuration of national boundaries. Furthermore, Eyal's allusion to Dana International is a curious one, given that Eyal and Dana International would seem to represent two opposing types of Israeli masculinity: while Eyal is associated with "the masculinizing and heterosexualizing project of Herzlian Zionism", Dana International marks a challenge to "the prime national ideals of heterosexual masculinity" (Solomon 2003, 150-151).¹³ In the words of Alisa Solomon,

If European Jews went to Palestine to become "normalized" as men, Dana International reversed the process. She went from Israel to Europe to become a woman (her 1993 genital surgery, described repeatedly and in detail in the Israeli press after the Eurovision contest, took place in Britain) and then she sashayed her queer femininity across the Eurovision stage. [...] Dana's symbolic rejection of the fundamentals of Zionism goes even further. She turned in a priestly, Israeli name for the moniker of a rootless cosmopolitan. What kind of Zionist calls herself International—and sings in Arabic as well as in Hebrew (and in French and English, as well)? "We don't need borders," Dana proclaimed exultantly the day after her Eurovision victory, in the ultimate rebuke to the ideal of the nation-state. (Ibid., 151)

¹³ Eyal's reference to Dana International is all the more surprising given that he has heretofore indicated his exclusive preference for male singers such as Bruce Springsteen, whose song "Tunnel of Love" becomes associated with Eyal's heterosexuality over the course of the film. On a side note, it might be interesting to compare Dana International to the popular Turkish singer Bülent Ersoy, who also underwent a sex change.

By alluding to, associating with, and defending figures of non-normative gender and sexual identity in this scene, Eyal forms an unexpected coalitional politics around past and present targets of (neo-)Nazi violence.¹⁴ However, rather than viewing Eyal in “the role of protector, firmly on the side of Axel and the attacked drag queens” (Kempinski 2007, 7), I would draw attention to the ways in which Eyal’s own Zionist masculinity becomes loosened through the evocation of the two terms against which it is defined: queerness and Nazi violence (cf. Solomon 2003, 152, 158). Indeed, within this scene, Eyal marks himself as a member of the German-Jewish diaspora by revealing his linguistic and affective ties to Germany. If, in the words of Daniel Boyarin, “Diaspora is essentially queer” (in marked contrast to “political Zionism,” which represented a “heterosexualizing project”), then Eyal’s self-positioning as a diasporic subject in this scene represents a transformation – and even queering – of his identity (Boyarin 1997, 229-231).¹⁵

While Jews, queers, and drag queens are here linked by association with the transgression and obscuration of boundaries of gender and nationality, the neo-Nazis’ assault on the drag queens becomes an occasion for the negotiation and articulation of the German body politic. Uli Linke has noted a point of discursive continuity between the Freikorps men and the German politicians who reacted against the “influx” of refugees and immigrants in the postwar era: both

¹⁴ Fox articulates Eyal’s shift in alliance through two shot/reverse-shot patterns near the beginning and end of the scene. As Eyal and Axel first encounter the drag queens, Fox alternates between over-the-shoulder shots of Eyal (from the point of view of Axel and the drag queens) and over-the-shoulder shots of Axel and the drag queens (from Eyal’s point of view); Eyal remains the outcast within this configuration. However, when Eyal later turns around and successfully defends the drag queens against the neo-Nazis, his alliance clearly shifts. Indeed, at the end of the scene, when Eyal pulls out his gun and forces the neo-Nazis to leave the station, Fox alternates between medium shots of Eyal and of the neo-Nazis.

¹⁵ Boyarin’s claim bears elaboration: “The situation of the European Diaspora male Jew as politically disempowered produced a sexualized interpretation of him as queer, because political passivity was [...] equated with homosexuality. As John Fout has written, ‘[...] The male homosexual only personified female characteristics, such as passivity and physical and emotional weaknesses.’ These ‘female characteristics’ are also, of course, the very characteristics identified as belonging to the Jew—by anti-Semites and Zionists. Diaspora is essentially queer, and an end to Diaspora would be the equivalent of becoming straight. The fact, then, that political Zionism was invented precisely at the time of the invention of heterosexuality is entirely legible” (Boyarin 1997, 229-231).

wished to hold the imagined national body “together as an entity, a distinct body with fixed boundaries” (Linke 1997, 563). Given this point of continuity, it is no surprise both that the neo-Nazis direct their attack against the drag queens and that the beginning of the attack (marked by the scream of one of the drag queens) interrupts Axel’s performance of Dana International’s song “Diva” – a performance which itself crosses lines of nationality and gender.¹⁶ Later in the scene, Eyal’s and Axel’s verbal accounts of the neo-Nazis become articulations of who should be driven *raus* from German space, here imagined as a collective body. Eyal tells a neo-Nazi, “Verpiss dich, du Arschloch, oder ich blas dir das Hirn raus!” [Fuck off, asshole, or I’ll blow your brains out!], and Axel later tells Eyal, “It’s too bad you didn’t kill him, dieses Stück Scheiße [this piece of shit]. These people pollute the world. They turn everything into shit.” Both statements rely on what Linke has called a “rhetoric of expulsion,” whereby “the denial of membership and the expulsion of people are linguistically conceptualized as processes of excorperation” (Linke 1995, 42-43). In using words such as “Arschloch” and “Scheiße” to label the neo-Nazis, Eyal and Axel associate the neo-Nazis with abject, contaminous elements of the collective national body. Since Jews were once subjected to this “rhetoric of expulsion” (see Linke 1997), Eyal’s statement – already notable for its indication of his fluency in German – becomes a means of reclaiming German space and even rearticulating German identity.

Like the drag queens, the very space in which the scene plays out serves as a “sign of overdetermination” (Garber 1992, 16). As Hamid Naficy notes in his study of “accented cinema,” borders, tunnels, and trains often serve within exilic and diasporic films as “important

¹⁶ “Diva” is the song with which the Israeli singer won the Eurovision song contest. On a side note, Axel’s performance in this scene recalls that in a previous scene of the film in Israel, in which he lip-syncs Esther Ofarim’s “Cinderella Rockafella” (Ofarim is another Israeli singer identified with the Eurovision Song Contest). Axel’s fluid sense of gender and sexuality manifests itself in his ability to switch roles; just as he says that he enjoys both sexual roles in his conversation with Eyal about anal sex, he initially performs both roles in Ofarim’s song until his sister joins him onstage.

transitional and transnational places and spaces,” as well as “privileged sites [...] of journeys of and struggles over identity” (Naficy 2001, 5).¹⁷ The Alexanderplatz station, which is known as one of Berlin’s major *Verkehrsknotenpunkte* [transportation hubs], serves as a *Knotenpunkt* [nodal point] for the various aspects of Eyal’s history and identity that converge in this scene. Not only does Eyal clearly associate the neo-Nazis with the Nazis who drove his family out of Germany; his fight with the neo-Nazis also leads him to reveal his fluency in German and his family’s ties to the country. Furthermore, a neighboring architectural structure becomes an overdetermined symbol of German-Jewish relations within the film’s diegesis. When Eyal bugs Pia’s apartment in Israel in an earlier scene of the film, he installs a microphone in a model-sized *Fernsehturm* [TV Tower] – a structure adjacent to Berlin’s Alexanderplatz. Later in the film, when the plot moves to Berlin, Fox juxtaposes Pia’s model-sized *Fernsehturm* against the “real” one, which Eyal sees from the window of his hotel room. In a film that contrasts Eyal’s preformed assumptions about Germany to his later experiences within the country, the *Fernsehturm* becomes a dynamic symbol of the space’s resonances and connotations for Eyal, as well of as the shifting dynamics of Eyal’s relationships with Pia and Axel.

Beyond representing a transformation in both Eyal’s identity and his relationship to Germany, the Alexanderplatz station complements the scene’s thematic of national and corporal boundaries, as well as its interest in unexpected linkages between and among various minority groups. As Eyal and Axel walk down the staircase of the Alexanderplatz station in this scene, they approach the track for the U8, a line that moves between East and West Berlin. During the years of Berlin’s division, the U8 track was separated from the rest of the Alexanderplatz station,

¹⁷ It is debatable whether Naficy’s concept of an “accented cinema” is applicable to *Walk on Water*. Eytan Fox, who was born in New York and moved to Israel at age two, would probably not be considered a diasporic or exilic director under Naficy’s criteria. Nevertheless, given *Walk on Water*’s explicit thematic preoccupation with matters of diaspora and exile (as well as its status as a transnational co-production), I find Naficy’s theoretical framework apropos.

and its access points were walled off; it thereby became one of Berlin's so-called "*Geisterbahnhöfe*" [ghost stations]. Fox's use of this overdetermined site of division thus becomes an ideal backdrop for a scene in which national and corporal boundaries are crossed and obscured. Furthermore, as noted earlier, Berlin becomes the third city depicted in the film that is marked by a history of East/West division; the film begins in Istanbul (identified in the film as the "border between Asia and Europe"), continues in Jerusalem (with its literal and figurative divisions between Israelis and Palestinians), and then moves to Berlin – a city known for, and still marked by, its walled division between 1961 and 1989.

Just as Turkey becomes a part of this triangulation with Germany and Israel, Turkish-Germans become a part of the constellation of minority subjects evoked within this scene. Indeed, after initially parting ways with the drag queens, Axel tells Eyal that many of the drag queens volunteer at his organization – an organization that assists Turkish children in Berlin. It is at this point in the scene that Eyal both orders Axel not to "patronize" him and reminds Axel, "We invented Dana International." Much as the epithet "schwule Sau" becomes the point of transference between the *Judensau* and *Türkensau* in Ataman's film, then, queers and drag queens serve as the links between Jews and Turks within this scene of Fox's film. As Jeffrey Peck notes in his comparative study of Jews and Turks as "minorities in Germany after the Holocaust," both groups serve as "constant reminders of history and its import for contemporary identities that are intertwined and constantly shifting" (Peck 1997, 8); furthermore, both groups' mere presence within the overdetermined German cultural terrain "unsettles the established notion of what it means to be German" (Peck 2006, 102). While the ghosts of history haunt characters and viewers alike throughout this scene in one of Berlin's former *Geisterbahnhöfe*, Fox himself challenges fixed conceptions of Germanness and alterity by evoking illicit

Berührung across a range of temporal and spatial markers, and between and among Germans, Jews, and Turks.

In “Transculturation, *Transe* Sexuality, and Turkish Germany: Kutluğ Ataman’s *Lola und Bilidikid*,” Christopher Clark subscribes to the notion of a utopian queerness and propagates a universalizing discourse of liminality – a discourse wherein transvestism becomes an overarching metaphor for the transnational condition. I would concede that both *Lola + Bilidikid* and *Walk on Water* contain utopian moments and use queerness and drag as ways of challenging dominant articulations of the body politic. However, in my opinion, the films belie both a notion of homosexual relations as a utopian equalizer and a belief in the efficacy of gender performativity as a means of fully overcoming hegemonic boundaries.¹⁸ As I have sought to demonstrate in my analyses of the scenes from *Lola + Bilidikid* and *Walk on Water*, queerness and drag do not serve as overarching metaphors for transnationalism so much as they represent, mediate, and facilitate illicit forms of *Berührung* across corporal and national boundaries. Furthermore, these forms of *Berührung* are staged in certain overdetermined spaces in Berlin where various aspects of characters’ identities converge, as well as where a constellation of Germans, Jews, and Turks is evoked. Even if these films do not promise a radical queer utopianism, then, they offer forms of *Berührung* among objects and entities that usually remain separated within current debates and discourses in Germany. For films that engage with the spatial politics of contemporary Germany, the use of overdetermined spaces serves as a primary

¹⁸ Furthermore, the films themselves are not immune from the reification of stereotypes and the reinscription of traditional hierarchies. It bears noting that female characters are largely marginalized within these films, and the realm of performativity is coded as a male one; in the words of Barbara Mennel, “femininity is inscribed as essential ground, on the basis of which masculinity can become performative” (Mennel 2007, 160). For more on *Lola + Bilidikid*’s reification of stereotypes, see Mennel 2007 and Zaimoğlu 1999.

means of evoking “touch” across established spatial and temporal parameters, as well as of unsettling static notions of German space and identity.

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