

Lynda Barry, Ben Katchor, Gary Panter, Kaz, Chris Ware and Mark Beyer to American and European audiences.<sup>208</sup> Importantly, it was also around this time that an expressionist artistic language emerged that not only engaged the composition, angularity and woodcut print aesthetic of early German modernism; it also featured a dramatic shift in content as well.



Fig. 1.52 (left): Spiegelman, “Maus,” in *RAW* 1, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books, 1980), n.p.

Fig. 1.53 (right): Spiegelman, “Maus,” in *Funny Animals* (San Francisco: Apex Novelties, 1972), 9.

The centerpiece of *RAW* was Spiegelman’s own story, “Maus” (fig. 1.52).<sup>209</sup> “Maus” had previously appeared in prototype form as a three-page comic in the underground magazine *Funny Animals* published in 1972 by Apex Novelties (fig. 1.53), but in *RAW* it became a serialized graphic narrative.<sup>210</sup> The comic recounted the story of Spiegelman’s father’s life in Poland before WWII, his internment in Auschwitz, and the impact of the Holocaust on his family and new life in the United States after 1945, representing Jews as mice and Nazis as cats in the greatest antagonism between Tom and Jerry ever penned.

<sup>208</sup> Duin, “Raw,” 365; Heer, *In Love with Art*, 79/

<sup>209</sup> Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels*, 127-128; Mazur and Danner *Comics: a Global History, 1968-present*, 185.

<sup>210</sup> Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels*, 127-128

Subverting the conventions of the comics medium to use “funny animals” to thematize such serious subject matter was itself interventional; however, openly tackling the Holocaust and the trauma of Spiegelman’s own family history through the comics form was revolutionary. After winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, Spiegelman’s *Maus* had successfully proven that comics could tell important stories without superheroes.<sup>211</sup> *Maus* changed both the content and the perception of the medium, paving the way for comics to be incorporated into serious literary discussion and academic study, escaping the ‘humor’ shelves in commercial bookstores.<sup>212</sup>



Fig. 1.54: Spiegelman, “Chapter 5: Mouse Holes,” in *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973-1991), 127.

Fig. 1.55: Spiegelman, “Chapter 2: Auschwitz (Time Flies),” in *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, 201.

<sup>211</sup> Mazur and Danner, *Comics: a Global History, 1968-present*, 187.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.



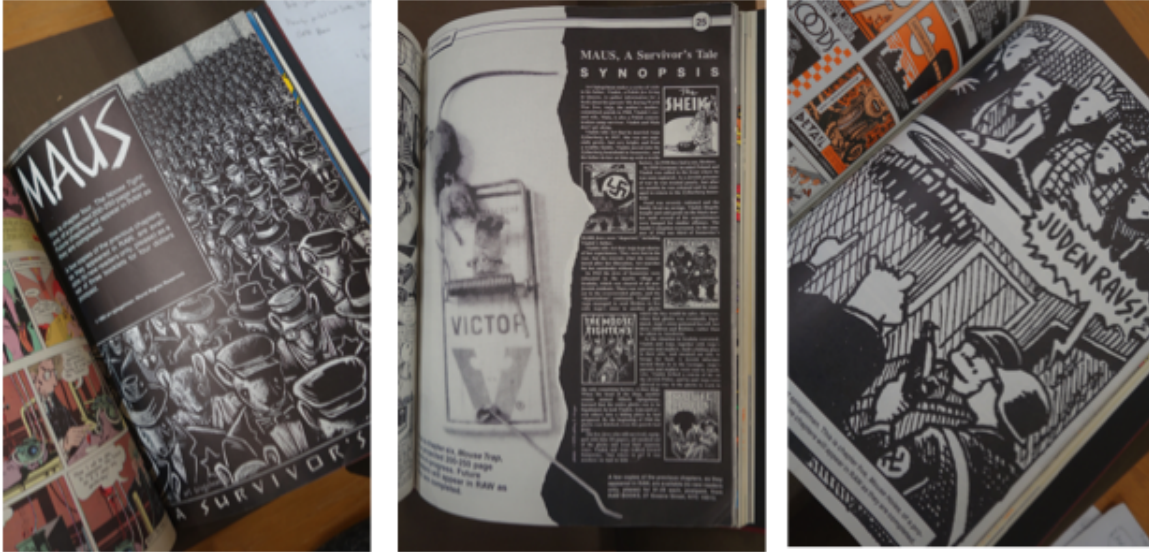


Fig. 1.56 (left): Spiegelman, “Maus: A Survivor's Tale (Chapter Four): The Noose Tightens,” in *RAW* 5, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1983), 47.

Fig. 1.57 (center): Spiegelman, “Maus, a Survivor's Tale: Synopsis,” in *RAW* 7, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1985), 25.

Fig. 1.58 (right): Spiegelman, “Maus: A Survivor’s Tale: Chapter 5: Mouse Holes,” in *RAW* 6, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1983), 43.

The representational mode of *Maus* also drew significant attention. In contradiction to the comical aesthetic position suggested by the representation of human figures as animals, the visual language of the comic itself is dark, dense and morbid. The panels and images are exclusively in black and white, heavily shaded with crosshatching and solid black planes to create depth. Its divergence from the earlier visual rhetoric of underground comix is clear, as is the expressionist rendering of the figures.<sup>213</sup> While the space constructed maintains an adherence to realistic representational space, the shading, simplicity of the line work and angularity of the figures’ bodies is reminiscent of expressionist engraving. Furthermore, when asked how he decided on the visual surface

<sup>213</sup> The influence of expressionism is made especially explicit when panels from the chapters of *Maus* featured in *RAW* are compared to its prototype in *Funny Animals* (fig. 1.43). The earlier version featured a more conventional strategy of portraying cartoon animals, while also emulating the archetypal mode of representation of underground comix in its stylization of the figures themselves.

of *Maus*, the artist cites the art of expressionist George Grosz.<sup>214</sup>

Looking at the original printings of the chapters in *RAW*, the connection to the aesthetics of printmaking is clear both as a consequence of the quality of the printing and in the cover art chosen for the mini-issues themselves as well as in the enlarged images Spiegelman selected to showcase the work. However, returning to Spiegelman's earliest incarnation of the *Maus* narrative, "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" (fig. 1.59), which not only inspired the visual rhetoric of the subsequent chapters but also became part of the graphic narrative itself within *RAW* and in the later published collection of the chapters, Spiegelman's expressionist influence is much easier to trace.

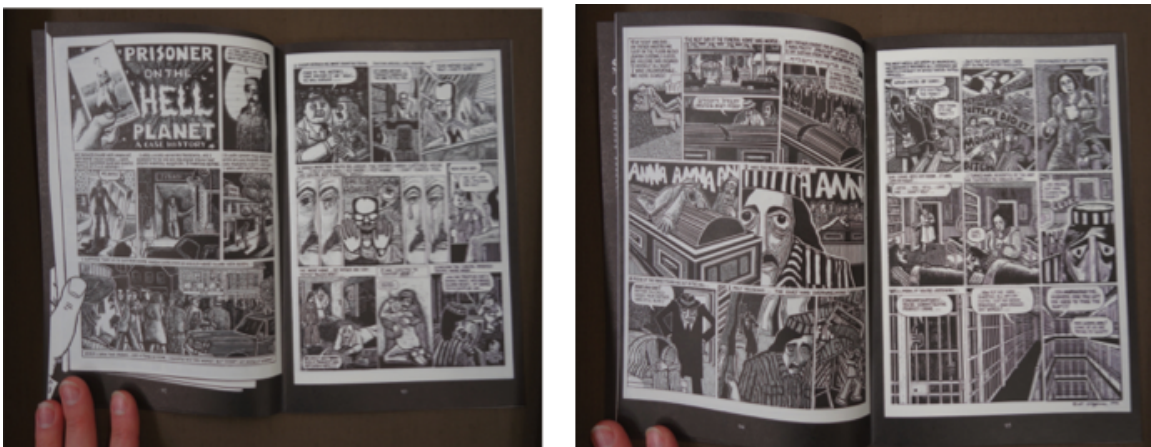


Fig. 1.59: Spiegelman, "Prisoner on the the Hell Planet," in *RAW* 6, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1980), n.p.

In 1973, Spiegelman published "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" in *Short Order Comix* #1.<sup>215</sup> It was reprinted in *Breakdowns* (1977) and then again in *RAW* issue 6 (1980, fig. 1.59), before finding its final home amid the pages of Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986). The comic functioned as the "thematic center to both *Breakdowns* and the graphic novel *Maus*, where it was reprinted as a visually disruptive, but essential,

<sup>214</sup> Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus: a look inside a modern classic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 143.

<sup>215</sup> Paul Williams and James Lyons, *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts* (Jackson [Miss.]: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 216.

comic within a comics.”<sup>216</sup> As a powerful representation of the suicide of his concentration-camp-survivor mother, “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” is remarkable for the way in which it deals with this traumatic experience as remembered by her son. However, it is not only the content that lends power to the depiction; it is also its decidedly expressionist mode of representation.

The short four-page comic opens with the title jumping out of the page as the narrator – or perhaps embodied reader – examines a photo of Artie and his mother. Immediately in the second line of panels, the visual language of the graphic narrative takes an expressionistic turn. With Artie’s father, Vladek, standing within an irregularly shaped doorway, he towers over the body of Artie’s dead mother, Anya. The architectural space is rendered unreal and claustrophobic, and it is hard to imagine the stark angles of the doorframe allowing for the door to close successfully. Furthermore, the depth of the space is flattened, complicated and disrupted by the various patterns on the adjacent walls. The flower wallpaper, hanging towel and tile work behind the door seem to flow into each other without adequate demarcations that guide the reader’s interpretation of their position in the anterior space. Furthermore, Vladek’s elongated proportions and long face echo expressionist visual tropes in representing anguish, vaguely recalling Edvard Munch’s *Scream* (1893–1893).

While the succeeding panels continue to exhibit a relationship with the aesthetic of the woodcut print, a consequence of the particular technique of the scratchboard medium (explained below) as much as the artist’s intention, the visual style begins to shift back and forth between a realistic perspective and the expressionist mode of representation, the oscillation depending on the psychological experience of the narrator.

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<sup>216</sup> Heer, *In Love with Art*, 59.

For example, as Artie is brought to Anya's doctor, the panel presents the figure head-on, with the space adhering to the conventions of linear perspective. In the next panel, however, the space surrounding the doctor has suddenly constricted and the right angles of the previous panel appear either acute or obtuse. Even the figure of the doctor himself becomes distorted, with his arms appearing elongated and his hands resting in a sinister position on his desk. However, the third panel featuring the doctor demonstrates the pinnacle of the graphic narrative's expressionist mode of representation, as the physician morphs into a psychotic-looking figure with comically large hands, maniacal expression and gaping mouth. Consistent with its origins in German modernism, the expressionist stylization of the figure and space is rendered an externalization of Artie's subjective experience that lends outward expression to the emotional and psychological experience of the narrator.

As briefly mentioned above, the formal characteristics of "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," which was drafted on scratchboard, also gesture towards its expressionist influences. Similar to expressionist print making strategies, scratchboard is a form of direct engraving, in which the artist uses a sharp tool to scrape off dark ink revealing a white or colored layer beneath. Unlike conventional drawing, scratchboard requires the artist to develop the image through the addition of highlights. The artist is thereby able to reproduce the sharpness, contrast and texture of more traditional forms of engraving without the painstaking process of working with metal or wood. However, the aesthetic produced often mirrors the geometry and angularity of other forms of engraving. In fact, in Spiegelman's 2010 *Paris Review* essay on the expressionist woodcuts of Lynd Ward (1905–1985), he situates his own work in *Maus* within the lineage of expressionist



woodcut wordless novels, citing Ward as one of his many inspirations.<sup>217</sup>

When conceiving the visual mode for the expansion of Spiegelman's four-page expressionist experiment in autobiographical comics, he initially considered producing the entire *Maus* series on scratchboard, as he sought to replicate the woodcut print aesthetic.<sup>218</sup> However, he was worried about the excessive time such an endeavor would require. Ultimately, Spiegelman decided against a more elaborate visual style for *Maus* because he wanted rather to emulate the intimacy of the diary form in both lettering and images.<sup>219</sup> The fundamentals of these expressionist aesthetics, however, remained even in the final version of *Maus*'s pages.

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<sup>217</sup> Spiegelman, "The Woodcuts of Lynd Ward," n.p.; Paul Tumej, "Art as Transformation: WORDLESS!," *The Comics Journal*, Dec. 2015, [www.tcj.com/art-as-transformation-wordless](http://www.tcj.com/art-as-transformation-wordless). Lynd Ward was an American that studied fine arts at the Columbia Teachers College in New York; however, shortly after graduation, he and his new wife took an extended honeymoon in Europe, after which the couple settled for a year in Leipzig, where Ward studied at the National Academy of Graphic Arts and Bookmaking. There he learned etching, lithography and wood engraving. He was particularly influenced by his instruction from Hans Alexander "Theodore" Mueller, and his discovery of Frans Masereel's woodcut novel *The Sun* (1919) fundamentally changed the direction of his career. After returning to the United States, and being inspired by German artist Otto Nückel and his woodcut novel *Destiny* (1926), Ward produced the first American woodcut novel *Gods' Man* in 1929. It sold more than 20,000 copies, and fundamentally changed the direction of the development of the comics medium. He made five subsequent woodcut novels over the course of his lifetime: *Madman's Drum* (1930), *Wild Pilgrimage* (1932), *Prelude to a Million Years* (1933), *Song Without Words* (1936), and *Vertigo* (1937). Also an important source of inspiration for Will Eisner, the woodcut novels of Ward brought a specific German Expressionist visual rhetoric to American soil, inspiring Spiegelman to look further into the wordless novels of German expressionism and ultimately informing his visual rhetoric first in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," later *Maus* and lastly, in Art Spiegelman and Phillip Johnston's performance piece, *WORDLESS!*, which featured imagery from a number of expressionist woodcut novelists including Frans Masereel, Lynd Ward, and Otto Nückel.

<sup>218</sup> Spiegelman, *Meta Maus*, 143.

<sup>219</sup> Heer, *In Love with Art*, 77.



Fig. 1.60: Gary Panter, "Jimbo Erectus," in *RAW* 4, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1982), 21.

Fig. 1.61: Panter, "Jimbo is stepping off the edge of a cliff!" in *RAW* 8, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1986), 30-31.

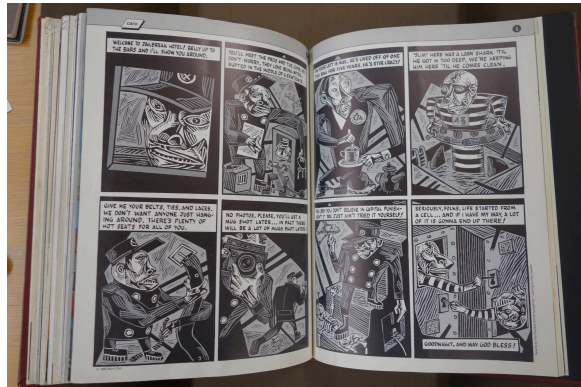


Fig. 1.62: Bruno Richard, "Homages Postumes," in *RAW* 1, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books, 1980), 4-5.

Fig. 1.63: Caro, "Jailbreak Hotel," 4-5.



Fig. 1.64: Jerry Moriarty, "Jack Survives," in *RAW* 6, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics), 40-41.

Fig. 1.65: José Antonio Muñoz, "Tenochtitlan," in *RAW* 6, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics), 15.





Fig. 1.66: Beyer, “City of Terror,” in *RAW* 2, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books, 1980), 10-11.

Fig. 1.67: Beyer, “Dead Things,” 22-23.

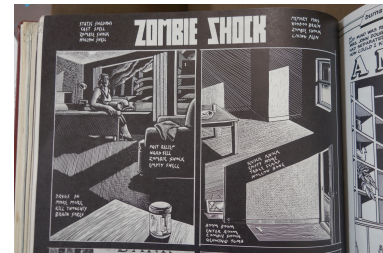
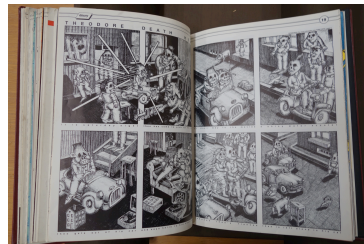


Fig. 1.68 (left): Scott Gills, “I am a Cliché,” *RAW* 7, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1985), 28-29.

Fig. 1.69 (center): Pascal Doury, “Theodore Death Head,” *RAW* 5, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1983), 18-19.

Fig. 1.70 (right): Mark Fisher, “Zombie Shock,” *RAW* 6, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1984), 48.

With the appearance of his expressionist experiments in *Arcade Review* (“Real Dream,” 1975) and later in *RAW* magazine, Spiegelman both defined the parameters of the emergent genre while also perhaps representing a new direction in the visual language of alternative comics thereafter. Since Spiegelman and Eisner’s initial mobilization of the style, the aesthetics of expressionism and expressionist printmaking techniques have continued to influence comics. The dark, angular and psychological landscape of *Batman*, for example, and specifically Tim Burton’s films from 1989 and 1992, unequivocally draws on expressionist visual strategies as well as film noir, which itself has its roots in German expressionism. Similarly, the work of other artists who appeared in *Raw* during the 1980s and early 1990s clearly drew from the expressionist visual rhetoric. Gary

Panter and Bruno Richard’s punk-rock scratchy and chaotic expressive lines (fig. 1.60, 1.61 and 1.62) Marc Caro (fig. 1.63) and Jerry Moriarty’s mobilization of the woodcut print aesthetic (fig. 1.64), José Antonio Muñoz and Mark Beyer’s grotesque bodies in black and white (fig. 1.65, 1.66 and 1.67), and Scott Gills, Pascal Doury and Mark Fisher’s scratchboard comics and illustration (fig. 1.68, 1.69 and 1.70) all register as neo-expressionist. While each individual artist’s adoption or interpretation of expressionism and the aesthetics of printmaking might have originated from different influences, which would have been difficult to perceive from the point of reception, the pervasiveness of these aesthetics in alternative comics was clear. Even Robert Crumb’s work in *RAW* in 1985 (fig. 1.71) moves towards mimicking the use of printmaking techniques to build the image through negative space and conventions of film noir.



Fig. 1.71: Robert Crumb, “Jelly Role Morton’s Voodoo Curse,” *RAW* 7, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books & Graphics, 1985), 4-6.

By the eighth and final issue of the first volume of *RAW* in 1986, Spiegelman and Mouly even go so far as to characterize the humor section of the edition, an uncharacteristic addition to the magazine, as “expressionist” (fig. 1.72). Subtitled “Some RAW Artists Seeking Inspiration,” “GAGZ” of *RAW* #8 is a collage of historical and contemporary artwork featuring a variety of artistic modes of representation from around the world, collapsing art historical time and space. It features two images from woodcut novelist and expressionist printmaker Frans Masereel (fig. 1.73 and 1.74), among other



images by Marc Caro, Wayne White, Charles Burns and others, which in fact also look like woodcuts and several of which were scratchboard. The “Expressionist Yoks” of Spiegelman’s eighth issue therefore bring the expressionist influences of *RAW* in full circle.

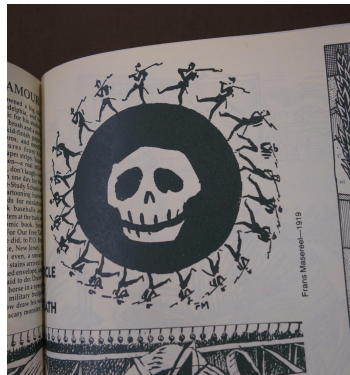


Fig. 1.72 (left): “RAW GAGZ,” *RAW* 8, in *RAW* 8, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books, 1986), 45.

Fig. 1.73 (center): Masereel, untitled, in *RAW* 8, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books, 1986), 47.

Fig. 1.74 (right): Masereel, *RAW* 8, untitled, in *RAW* 8, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Raw Books, 1986), 50.

Ultimately, there existed an expressionist impulse in visual language of American alternative comics. This either manifested as a trend in artistic modes of representation or in editorial decisions by Spiegelman and Mouly in their selection of work to publish.

Either way, the result was the same, and the neo-expressionist artwork in *RAW* encouraged other artists to adopt the visual language.

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Reading *RAW* post-1989, Feuchtenberger would have encountered this myriad of expressionist visual languages in the aesthetics of alternative comics. Familiar with the neo-expressionist visual rhetoric prevalent in East German *Plakatkunst*, the early German

modernist style of American alternative comics would have resonated with her, while also reflecting the spirit of the revolutionary events surrounding German unification aesthetically. By adopting this mode of representation, Feuchtenberger aligned her artistic endeavors with a visual language that embodied the revolutionary moment of 1989 by visually revisiting the aesthetics of protest of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and American alternative comics simultaneously. Her early expressionist aesthetic thereby anticipated the political interventions of Feuchtenberger's poster work for the East German Women's Movement and related comics in *Mutterkuchen* (1995).

However, the question remains, with the same aesthetics populating their graphic narration and their poster art, which came first? Was Feuchtenberger experimenting with the aesthetics of early German expressionism in her posters before she adopted the same visual style in her comics? Or vice versa? I contend that these developments were simultaneous because another significant aspect of Feuchtenberger's artistic production and innovation in the comics medium was the way in which the formal qualities, content and characters of Feuchtenberger graphic art moved fluidly across the boundaries of the media in which she worked.

### **Panels to Posters and Posters to Panels: Fluidity of Form in Feuchtenberger's Graphic Art**

In addition to Feuchtenberger's adoption of early German expressionism, she introduced another set of radical aesthetics to sequential art and poster design after 1989. Looking at Feuchtenberger's posters art during the 1990s, it is clear that her work in comics began to inform her *Plakatkunst* – and vice versa – in innovative new ways.

Before 1989, most East German theater posters exhibited a static quality without overt allusions to the passing of time or the representation of multiple moments.

However, when Feuchtenberger began experimenting with graphic narrative and early German expressionism, her poster art evolved as well. Feuchtenberger's theater posters began to represent temporality and sequentiality differently than the metaphorical or static thematic representations of traditional theater posters. By incorporating comics-derived sequential, temporal, and narrative strategies, such as paneling, speech balloons, and line-work that implied movement and sound, Feuchtenberger, and to a similar extent Wagenbreth (fig. 1.77), introduced new design possibilities to German poster art after 1989.



Fig. 1.75: “Gelb ist klug,” 1993.



Fig. 1.76: “Manfred im Boot oder Der Teufel mit den drei goldenen Haaren,” *Theater Handgemenge*, ca. 1994.

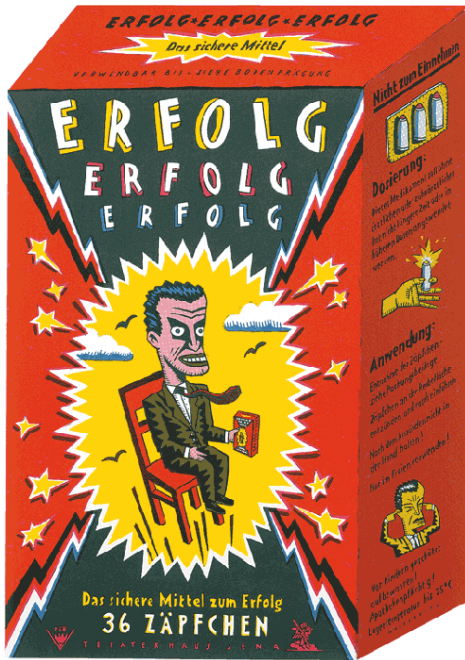


Fig. 1.77: Wagenbreth, “Erfolg Erfolg Erfolg,” Theaterhaus Jena, 1994.

Feuchtenberger’s “Auszug aus dem Märchen” (fig. 1.78) is a particularly excellent example of a theater poster with strong narrative emphases, where the protagonist is presented mid-gait and mid-conversation.

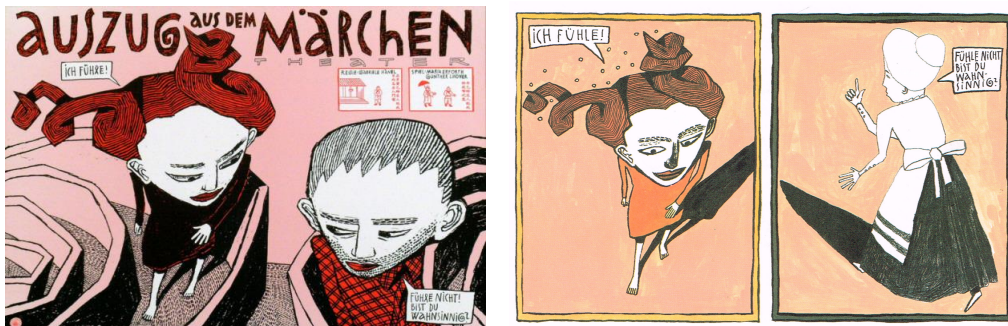


Fig. 1.78: Feuchtenberger, “Auszug aus dem Märchen,” 1993.

Fig. 1.79: Feuchtenberger “Die Strudel Petra,” in *Mutterkuchen* (Berlin: Jochen Enterprises, 1993), n.p.

It engages comics-derived narrative strategies visually, operating sequentially or in tandem with other images in her graphic art. This poster, in particular, is in dialogue with one of Feuchtenberger’s first comics, “Die Strudel Petra” (fig. 1.79) from *Mutterkuchen* (1995), in which she records the same conversation. While the conversations and



protagonists featured in “Die Strudel Petra” and this poster are identical, Feuchtenberger alters the context of the exchange through the second figure. Instead of presenting the reader with a mother and child, as Feuchtenberger does in her comic, which I examine more closely in Chapters Two and Three; the poster depicts a man and woman, complicating the conversation in the comic and adding a new dimension to the gender politics of the play.

Mirroring the exchange between mother and child in “Die Strudel Petra,” the woman utters mid gait “Ich fühle” [“I feel”]. The suggestions here are various, implying both a physical ability to touch oneself and the physical sensation of feeling touch itself, while also insinuating masturbation and an ability to feel emotion. The man responds: “Fühle nicht! Bist du wahnsinnig?” [“Don’t feel! Are you crazy?”]. Changing the gender dynamic but maintaining the protagonist and dialogue from “Strudel Petra” draws a direct connection between the narrative of the comic and the story of the play, which I examine in more detail in Chapter Three, informing the reading of both.

For the purposes of comparison, Wagenbreth’s poster work offers another example of how Feuchtenberger’s colleagues also integrated comic strategies into their poster art. In “The Polonaise of Oginski” (fig. 1.80), for instance, the centrally-located female figure instructs to an imagined other to “Go East Go West.” While her oversized representation in comparison to the guards that surround her is not meant to be realistic, she exists in proportion to the objects she accompanies, as she appears to be walking out of the picture plane. Furthermore, the speech balloon presenting the command implies both action outside of the representational space of the poster and a certain temporality.

A second poster by Wagenbreth, “Have you ever seen a rabbit on a horse” (fig.

1.81) is clearly in visual and verbal dialogue with “The Polonaise of Oginski.” Made during the same era of Wagenbreth’s work for the Jena Theaterhaus, these images operate sequentially, much like a comic strip, informing each other’s content and reading.



Fig. 1.80: Wagenbreth, “Die Polonaise von Oginski,” Theaterhaus Jena, 1991.

Fig. 1.81: Wagenbreth, “Have you ever seen a rabbit on a horse,” Theaterhaus Jena, c. 1990-1995.

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In an appropriately named essay “From Panel to Poster,” Pascal Lefèvre traces the contemporary influence of comics on poster art. He argues that with their strong visual appeal, comics and posters became the first real mass media, soon followed by cinema.<sup>220</sup> Consequently, a fruitful relationship has developed between the two media. Exploiting aspects of the comics form, such as the ben-day dot aesthetic (in Roy Lichtenstein’s painting), famous characters (Mickey Mouse, Tintin, and the Yellow Kid), or medium specific qualities (speech balloon,

<sup>220</sup> Pascal Lefèvre, “From Panel to Poster,” in *Poster Collection* (Zürich: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, 2008), 45.

onomatopoeia, a particular drawing style, typical comics mise en scene, etc.), poster designers have adopted comics strategies to increase the effectiveness of their advertising.

However, Lefevre is only commenting on how comics have been influencing poster design. With regards to the artistic production of PGH and specifically Feuchtenberger, the influence has gone both ways. Beyond the text and image hybridity of both forms, a certain resonance exists specifically between Feuchtenberger's comics and theater posters after 1989. Not only does her graphic narrative and poster art adopt the same visual rhetoric of early German expressionism; her comics and posters are also often in dialog, the subject of the next chapter, sharing thematic interests, characters and politics as well as comics-derived sequential, narrative and temporal strategies. Feuchtenberger's graphic art therefore occupies a visual space in which a form of East-West cultural production emerges that privileges neither the Western medium of comics, nor East German artistic traditions, specifically that of *Plakatkunst*, but engages aspects of both.

### **Conclusion: the Cultural Politics of Feuchtenberger's Expressionism**

Feuchtenberger's appropriation of the aesthetic of the woodcut print, sharp corners, collapsing and contradicting architectural spaces, and distorted and grotesque bodies hail from an earlier iteration of German expressionism than the alternative visual rhetorics of neo-expressionism in the GDR. However, they are also not directly derived from the visual languages of expressionism found in the American alternative comics of the 1980s and early 1990s. Instead, Feuchtenberger's expressionist aesthetics come from a synthesis of these influences, working in combination with her visually poetic form of graphic storytelling to impart a representation of the world that is innovative,

interventional and utterly unique. Feuchtenberger's adoption of the representational style of early German expressionism was therefore neither an extension of the aesthetics of East Germany, as some German comics historians have argued, nor as the artist herself articulates, a reaction against them;<sup>221</sup> instead, the expressionist visual rhetoric of Feuchtenberger's early sequential art was a combination of both of these impulses. Appropriating the aesthetic of the woodcut print simultaneously differentiated her work from the alternative and experimental art to emerge out of the last decade of the GDR and the state-mandated aesthetics of socialist realism, while allowing her to continue to work within a familiar aesthetic paradigm and engage in an important artistic style of American alternative comics.

Furthermore, much like her selection of the comics medium, an art form with a history of radical politics, Feuchtenberger's decision to work in the visual rhetoric of the historical German avant-garde was political. In our interview, she stated that her adoption of the visual language of the woodcut print was an attempt to distance herself from the aesthetics of East Germany fundamentally; however, from the point of reception, the political implication of this gesture goes one step further. The tumult, transition and optimism of the revolutionary moment of 1989 were quickly followed by disillusion. The ups and downs of the 1989 revolution thus mirrored to a certain extent the socio-politics and collective sentiment of post-WWI Weimar Germany. Expressionism therefore became a visual language to contend with these pressures and impulses, post-1918 as well as post-1989. Like the expressionists after WWI, Feuchtenberger also mobilized the

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<sup>221</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2016.



expressionist aesthetic in combination with the politics of the age to create “a collective portrait of a society in uneasy transition.”<sup>222</sup>

However, that society in transition was not the same as the one in post-war shambles during the Weimar Republic; instead, Feuchtenberger graphically captured the tumult, transition and politics of 1989 and the economic chaos and moral quandaries of the post-unification period – and specifically, its gender politics, as the following chapters demonstrate. Furthermore, integrating the aesthetic experiments of American alternative comics aligned her project with the leftist politics of that scene, while building on Spiegelman’s intervention in the possibilities of comic content, putting Feuchtenberger’s work in conversation with the important women working internationally in the form, such as Phoebe Gloeckner, Trina Robbins and Aline Kominsky-Crumb. Feuchtenberger’s early expressionist aesthetic thereby anticipated the political interventions of her work, specifically in her poster art for the East German Women’s Movement, which is the focus of Chapter Two, and related comics in *Mutterkuchen* (1995), the subject of Chapter Three.

In addition, Feuchtenberger’s graphic art exhibited a fluidity of form – typical of the East German avant-garde – that resulted in medium-specific characteristics traveling between their comics and poster art, each medium essentially informing the other.<sup>223</sup> This innovative form of “medium leakage” lent power to Feuchtenberger’s interventions in the politics of unification, as figures, aesthetics, themes and dialog moved between Feuchtenberger’s comics and posters to produce complex narratives which were derived

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<sup>222</sup> Stephanie Barron, *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933*, eds. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (New York, NY: Prestel Publishing, 2015), 24.

<sup>223</sup> The way in which Feuchtenberger’s work in the socialist theater and theater poster art informs her graphic narration is a subject for the expansion of this project.

from both. As I will discuss in the next two chapters, Feuchtenberger used these aesthetic strategies to intervene in the politics of the contemporary moment.

To briefly return to Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity that I present in the Introduction, Feuchtenberger – and to a similar extent Wagenbreth – developed a hybrid art form that brought together East German artistic traditions and international innovations in alternative comics through expressionism and formal fluidity. The emergence of this new genre of comics art therefore existed in an in-between space of cultural representation that disrupted the perception of a homogenous West-German-defined national culture after unification and intervened in the illusion of “consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions,” while also complicating the assertion that these artists' East German training redefined German comics.<sup>224</sup> Through Bhabha, Feuchtenberger's expressionist experiments give agency to the artist in developing cultural representations that draw from multiple sources, illustrating how some aspects of post-unification German culture, specifically comics, undermine assertions of West German hegemony and function – even today – as a space of cultural hybridity.

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<sup>224</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

## CHAPTER II

### The Aesthetics of Anke Feuchtenberger's Feminist Politics



Fig. 2.1: Feuchtenberger, “Alle Frauen sind mutig! stark! schön! Unabhängiger Frauenverband. Auch für Frauen und Kinder eine sorgenfreie Zukunft in dem Europäischen Haus” [“All women are brave! strong! beautiful! Independent Women’s Association. For women and children too, a carefree future in the European house”], Campaign poster for March 1990 East German parliamentary elections, 1990.

Following the peaceful revolution of 1989 that destroyed the Berlin Wall, posters, such as this one (fig. 2.1), appeared all over the city advocating for the future of Germany. Berlin was rife with political debate and idealist dreams, but not all individuals sought the same goals. Existing in opposition to popular sentiment calling for unification, East German feminists advocated for the reform rather than dissolution of the East German State. This poster, commissioned by the Unabhängiger Frauenverband (Independent Women’s Association), came to symbolize the efforts of the East German Women’s

Movement. Reading “Alle Frauen sind mutig! stark! schön!” [“All women are brave! strong! beautiful!”], it advocated for the security of women and children in both the metaphorical and political European House.

Vibrant and playful, the poster depicts three stereotypical female figures, a princess, a witch and a mother. However, while the witch with her angular facial features riding a broom and the princess kissing her frog-prince derive their iconography from fairytales, the attributes of the central figure spring from a different type of mythological woman – the archetypal East German mother. Placed centrally between the other two figures, she stands defiantly staring up and out of the picture plane. Overburdened with grocery bags and two children, the pregnant mother carries a door tucked under her left arm. While the fairytale figures ironically appear to embody courage, strength *or* beauty, this figure represents all three. The poster thereby advocates humorously for the fair treatment of all women and children no matter their story, projecting unity through difference and sending out a rallying cry to the women of East Germany. Engaging stereotypes of East German femininity, the ubiquity of the mother’s predicament suggests that despite the narrative of the East German mother, good or evil, princess or witch, all mothers and their children deserved a “carefree future within the European House,” alluding both to safety and equality within Germany as well as government representation.

This poster, along with other works by East German graphic designer Anke Feuchtenberger, soon became synonymous with the independent East German Women’s Movement that had developed in the 1980s. Feuchtenberger continued to produce political posters for the Independent Women’s Association and other feminist groups

even after the vote in favor of unification had passed and the Association found itself on the political sidelines.<sup>225</sup>

Sharing many characteristics with her poster work, Feuchtenberger's comics are aesthetically and politically connected to her activism. While the politics of her feminism have since evolved, Feuchtenberger's early comics remain intimately connected to her work with the Independent Women's Association around 1989, continuing to examine gender equality, hegemonic notions of female sexuality and Germany's patriarchal power structures during the subsequent two decades.

Throughout the early 1990s, Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired protagonist (fig. 2.2, 2.8, 2.10, 2.12, 2.16 and 2.17) became the icon of unification's feminist politics, advocating for the rights of women on posters across Berlin, while the same character reflected and critiqued Germany's post-1989 gender dynamics, interrogating socio-political contradictions on a personal level in her comics. In this chapter, I return to Feuchtenberger's training in the East German graphic arts and feminist activism to foreground a reading of her comics that teases out the politics of her art.

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Born in an East Berlin house full of art books in 1963 to a graphic designer father and an art teacher mother, Feuchtenberger was heavily influenced by the art she encountered during her upbringing.<sup>226</sup> She began her studies in the fine arts at the age of fifteen when she started taking evening classes at the Berlin Academy of the Arts. She

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<sup>225</sup> Feuchtenberger's work is featured on the covers and within the pages of publications on the history of East German women's movement. See, for example, Anne Ulrich Hamele's monograph on the Independent Women's Association, *Der Unabhängige Frauenverband: ein frauenpolitisches Experiment im deutschen Vereinigungsprozess* (2000).

<sup>226</sup> Feuchtenberger, interview by Mark David Nevins, "'From the Land Where the Word Balloons Throw Shadows': An Interview with Anke Feuchtenberger," *European Comic Art* 2.1 (2009.): 67. The influence of Käthe Kollwitz is apparent in Feuchtenberger's charcoal drawings and preoccupation with the female body, and the her embrace of comics in general could be traced to her love of the art of Rodolphe Töpffer.



continued her studies for four years before taking up a two-year photography internship and entering the graphic design program at the Academy for Visual Arts, Berlin-Weißensee in 1983, where she met the other members of PGH Glühende Zukunft, Henning Wagenbreth, Detlef Beck and Holger Fickelscherer.

The collapse of the German Democratic Republic coincided with the birth of her only child, Leo, marking the beginning of an important relationship that would later inspire much of her art. In 1989, Feuchtenberger was twenty-six, she had not left the Eastern bloc and had never read an adult-oriented comic book.<sup>227</sup> Yet within a decade, with the help of a few other East German comics artists, she revolutionized the medium.

When the Wall came down, Feuchtenberger moved with her infant son to West Berlin, where she spent the 1990s working as a freelance graphic designer. She primarily collaborated with theatre groups, making posters, costumes, puppet shows and stage designs, creating illustrations and drawings based on her imagination and literary works and beginning to experiment with comics.<sup>228</sup>

Feuchtenberger became more and more attracted to narrative and the dialog between image and text she was producing in her poster design, but the format limited her to representing only a single moment.<sup>229</sup> She was particularly interested in the connection between text and image, wanting to give her posters something more that

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. Feuchtenberger was aware of the most popular East German comic book, *Mosaik*, as a child, but she found the aesthetic ugly and the themes too juvenile (Nevins, 2009:70). Furthermore, while *Mosaik* maintained some of the conventions of the comics medium, it differentiated itself from western comic books in specific ways, and East German cultural authorities characterized it as a *Bildergeschichte* ("picture-story") and not a comic.

<sup>228</sup> Feuchtenberger, interview by Nevins, "From the Land Where the Word Balloons Throw Shadows," 71-72; Feuchtenberger, interview by Miyazaki Toshiki, "It's not just horror and black' - Interview with Anke Feuchtenberger," *Deutschsprachige Comics*, last modified Jan 2009, [www.goethe.de/kue/lit/prj/com/cav/cpf/en5012999.htm](http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/prj/com/cav/cpf/en5012999.htm); Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014.

<sup>229</sup> Feuchtenberger, interview by Toshiki, "It's not just horror and black," n.p.

connected the traditional text of the theatrical piece and the new image she created out of her imagination.<sup>230</sup> Drawn to the comics medium, her theater posters and program guides began to incorporate speech balloons (fig. 2.2) and sequentiality (fig. 2.3), which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter One.<sup>231</sup> At the same time, Feuchtenberger was also finding it difficult to work with actors and directors and soon realized that through comics she could tell the stories she wanted to tell, “without having to compromise.”<sup>232</sup> In comics she could create illustrated literary works able to incorporate all the artistic opportunities of the theater.

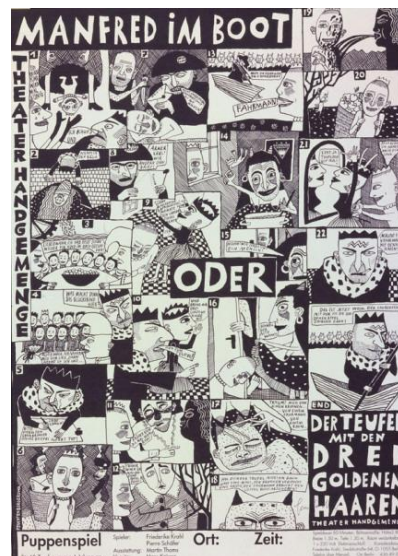


Fig. 2.2: Feuchtenberger, “Gelb ist klug” [“Yellow is clever”], 1993.

Fig. 2.3: Feuchtenberger, “Manfred im Boot oder Der Teufel mit den drei goldenen Haaren” [“Manfred in the Boat or The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs”], Theater Handgemenge, ca. 1994.

Beyond her theater work and its lasting influence on her subsequent output, as demonstrated in Chapter One, Feuchtenberger’s posters for feminist political

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.; Feuchtenberger, interview by Anette Selg, “Eine Instanz in der deutschen Comic-Szene: Porträt der Zeichnerin, Verlegerin und Professorin Anke Feuchtenberger.” *Deutschlandfunk*, last modified Sept. 27, 2012, [www.deutschlandfunk.de/eine-instanz-in-der-deutschen-comic-szene.807.de.html?dram:article\\_id=222458](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/eine-instanz-in-der-deutschen-comic-szene.807.de.html?dram:article_id=222458).

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Feuchtenberger, interview by Nevins, “From the Land Where the Word Balloons Throw Shadows,” 71-72.

organizations from the early 1990s also illustrate parallels between the artist's early artistic and activist endeavors and her comics. Characters, themes and artistic strategies repeated themselves across her panels and upon the walls of unified Berlin, cross-pollinating both her comics and her posters and layering them with political and narrative significance derived from each other.

### **Feuchtenberger and the East German Women's Movement**

After the opening of the GDR borders on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989, the women of East Germany rallied to influence the course of the revolution. In the wake of the political collapse of their government, many intellectuals and activists sought its reform rather than its abolition. These activists were deeply committed to developing democracy, yet they also shared a dedication to socialism that had developed over forty years of the GDR.<sup>233</sup> So while popular sentiment called for the unification of East and West, where East would adopt the lifestyle and consumer comforts of western living, these activists did not see West Germany as the "better Germany." They expressed concern about the excesses and shortcomings of capitalism along with a desire to maintain the achievements of socialism.<sup>234</sup> Consequently, a movement committed to reforming the GDR sought to recreate the nation as an autonomous, democratic state rather than dismantling it.<sup>235</sup>

Fighting for a "third way" between state socialism and capitalist democracy, East German activists advocated for a system that eschewed single-party Communism but preserved some of that system's accomplishments. They aspired neither to continue state

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<sup>233</sup> Lynn Kamenitsa, "The process of political marginalization: East German social movements after the wall," *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 3 (1998): 322.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.; Katrin Gottschalk, "Extrem laut und unglaublich vergessen," *Missy Magazine*, February 21, 2014, [missy-magazine.de/2014/02/21/extrem-laut-und-unglaublich-vergessen](http://missy-magazine.de/2014/02/21/extrem-laut-und-unglaublich-vergessen).

socialism as practiced by the GDR nor to adopt the western capitalism of the FRG; rather, they sought to deploy the best parts of both state formations. The solidarity and egalitarianism of socialism, its social services, and public ownership of the means of production were the ideology's success stories, and many East Germans did not want to lose the achievements of their government.<sup>236</sup> While wary of western-style capitalist, bourgeois democracy, activists sought to incorporate elements of its democratic structures, such as open elections with secret ballots, governance based on the rule of law, and protection of civil and human rights, working towards building a socialist alternative.

The most important arena in this debate for Feuchtenberger and fellow female activists were the achievements won by socialism on behalf of women and mothers. The GDR was committed to improving the financial, social and employment status of its women, and East German authorities did not assume that gender inequality would simply fade away on its own.<sup>237</sup> GDR state socialist politics found that the emancipation of society would also result in the liberation of women. Thus the emancipation of women became one step in the direction of the elimination of class division, with its primary course of action being women's recruitment into the labor force.<sup>238</sup> By 1972, the GDR had put official language into place defining the meaning of equality as the equal treatment of women and men in the employment sphere.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Kamenitsa, "The process of political marginalization," 322.

<sup>237</sup> Myra Marx Ferree, "The rise and fall of" mommy politics': Feminism and unification in (East) Germany," *Feminist Studies* 19 (1993): 91.

<sup>238</sup> Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, *Socialist modern: East German everyday culture and politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 287.

<sup>239</sup> Martina Fischer and Barbara Munske, "Women and the German Merger: Views from West Berlin," *Alternatives* 18.1(1993): 75; Gottschalk, "Extrem laut und unglaublich vergessen," n.p.; Ferree, "The rise and fall of" mommy politics'," 92. While the state considered the *Frauenfrage* settled long before its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, inequality still existed demonstrably in East Germany. Marxist dogma professed egalitarianism through the successful incorporation of women into the workforce, but it was not without its problems, and much of the female emancipation rhetoric was little more than lip service, Fischer and

As a result, the state offered much support – ideological, political, and financial – to assist women and mothers in acquiring and maintaining employment. Affirmative action laws assisted women entering the workforce and paid maternity leave alleviated the financial difficulties that accompanied childbirth. These laws also subsidized childcare for children from infancy to assist in women’s postpartum return to work. By 1989, with most children under three in low-cost subsidized out-of-home childcare and older children in kindergarten, ninety-one percent of working-aged East German women were employed. There existed no difference in formal job qualifications between the genders under the age of forty and half of all university students were women.<sup>240</sup>

Divorce was also easily obtained, and the GDR had an exceptionally high divorce rate, with many women choosing not to marry in the first place. Unmarried mothers received special preference in obtaining housing, and single motherhood was subsidized to even out the financial burden between one- and two-parent households, incentivizing East German women to bear children early and without a husband. As opposed to typical experiences of motherhood in West Germany, a child did not force East German women to become socially or economically dependent on men.<sup>241</sup> Consequently, East German women had the freedom to design their own lives in ways unimaginable for many West

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Munske, ““Women and the German Merger,” 75. Women were first and foremost the mothers and homemakers of modern Germany on both sides of the Wall, but since almost all East German women also participated in the workforce, the “double burden” of paid labor and unpaid housework was a significant issue in the East that pointed to problems in the logic behind the women’s question, Pence and Betts, *Socialist Modern*, 287. Successfully integrating women into the labor force therefore also required alleviating women’s household burdens, which the state never fully succeeded in doing, despite many efforts, Pence and Betts, *Socialist Modern*, 287.

<sup>240</sup> Ferree, "The rise and fall of" mommy politics," 91.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 92; Ferree, "Sociological Perspectives on Gender in Germany," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 12 (1996): 30-31.



German women, and there was a degree of female emancipation that existed in East Germany that was unparalleled in the West.<sup>242</sup>

In early December 1989, only a month after the opening of the GDR borders, 1,200 East German women committed to reforming the East German state mobilized to help direct the future of East German policy and rally against unification.<sup>243</sup> Some were already involved in oppositional grassroots movements, others were founding members of the small, local women's organizations that began to materialize in the 1980s, but many had only just experienced their political awakening during the peaceful revolution that overthrew the East German government.<sup>244</sup> All, however, were concerned with furthering gender equality, while retaining the freedom, rights and financial independence afforded to them by socialism in the next political iteration of East Germany. On a stage strewn with women's laundry, the event reached its climax when actress Walli Schmidt, dressed androgynously in an outfit comprised half of men's and half of women's clothing,

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<sup>242</sup> Marina A. Adler and April Brayfield, "East-West Differences in Attitudes about Employment and Family in Germany," *The Sociological Quarterly* 37.2 (1996): 249. Having a child and a fulltime job in the Federal Republic, on the other hand, was often mutually exclusive. As a consequence of short and irregular school hours, which often released children at lunch, and the difficulty of acquiring childcare for preschoolers, only a third of all West German women in their prime childbearing years were employed fulltime, and the percentage of women who would never have children was relatively high, Katrin Bennhold, "20 Years After Fall of Wall, Women of Former East Germany Thrive," *The New York Times*, Oct. 5, 2010, [www.nytimes.com/2010/10/06/world/europe/06iht-letter.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/06/world/europe/06iht-letter.html). Until 1977, West German women needed their husbands' permission to work and could be divorced by their partners for being a "bad housewife" until the 1960s, Bennhold, "20 Years After Fall of Wall," n.p. It is therefore unsurprising that West German women provided less than a quarter of the family income, most not earning enough to support themselves, never mind enough to raise a child alone. West German tax subsidies for married couples such as income splitting only increased the financial gulf between two-parent families and single mothers further, and West German single mothers were assigned a legal guardian until after unification, Ferree, "Sociological Perspectives on Gender in Germany," 30-31 and Bennhold, "20 Years After Fall of Wall," n.p. West German policies therefore encouraged marriage, motherhood, and women into the homemaker role, which consequently reinforced women's dependence on men in the West, making financial dependence on individual husbands heavily institutionalized in the West German system, Adler and Brayfield, "East-West Differences," 249 and Ferree, "Sociological Perspectives on Gender in Germany," 30-31.

<sup>243</sup> Gottschalk, "Extrem laut und unglaublich vergessen," n.p.; Andrea Wuerth, "National Politics/Local Identities: Abortion Rights Activism in Post-Wall Berlin." *Feminist Studies* 25.3 (1999): 608.

<sup>244</sup> Elizabeth Mittman, "Gender, citizenship, and the public sphere in postunification Germany: Experiments in feminist journalism," *Signs*, 32, no. 3 (2007): 760.

read aloud activist scholar Ina Merkel’s manifesto “No State Can Be Made without Women”: “For women, unification means three steps back...back to the stove”.<sup>245</sup> Phrased hyperbolically for effect, it was still clear that for these women, German unification implied moving backwards, away from gains in East German women’s rights. Adopting the manifesto’s title as their slogan, East German feminists founded the new Independent Women’s Association.

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Fig. 2.4: Feuchtenberger, “Mit Gefühl und Verstand und dem Unabhängigen Frauenverband” [“With feeling and understanding and the Independent Women’s Association”], for the March 1990 East German parliamentary elections, 1990.

Fig. 2.5: Feuchtenberger, “Mein Bauch gehört mir! Mit dem Unabhängigen Frauenverband für das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Frau - Bündnis 90, Grüne/UFV, Die Grünen/AL,” [“My belly belongs to me! With the Independent Women’s Association for women’s self-determination”], for the March 1990 East German parliamentary elections, 1990.

Visually supporting and politically collaborating with these activists was the work of Feuchtenberger, whose art rapidly became iconic within the movement. Often commissioned by the Independent Women’s Association, Feuchtenberger’s posters appeared in public spaces across the city of Berlin. Also producing artwork for feminist journals and magazines emerging alongside the East German Women’s Movement,

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.; Gottschalk, “Extrem laut und unglaublich vergessen,” n.p.

Feuchtenberger's art reveals the utopian ideals of East German feminism before unification and provides insight into the artist's own political position.

Feuchtenberger's poster "Mit Gefühl und Verstand und dem Unabhängigen Frauenverband" ["With feeling and understanding and the Independent Women's Association"] (fig. 2.4) portrays the utopian moment of the East German Women's Movement through its reference again to mythology, which is this time Biblical. As if standing on an abstracted ark, Feuchtenberger stages two nude women and a child staring out at the viewer. Accompanied by animals, a tree and a crowd of diminutive people looking forward, the poster expresses no anxiety in its representation of the women nor the "little people," who occupy the proverbial "same boat," reiterating the perspective of the feminists working in the Independent Women's Association and the message of a "carefree future" illustrated on "All women are brave! strong! beautiful!" (fig. 2.1). Feuchtenberger's poster illustrates how these activists felt they had a role to play in determining the future of socialism and were not pessimistic about the future.

Even Feuchtenberger's poster advocating for sustaining East German abortion legislation does not exhibit anxiety about the future (fig. 2.5). A woman looks upwards towards the viewer standing naked with a toddler resting on her hip. The perspective situates the viewer above the figure, as we look down onto the woman's broad shoulders and angular breasts, which in turn reflect the angularity of the mother's vibrant purple hair, the color of the movement, moving in the opposite direction. She stands on an abstracted rounded landscape adorned with flattened flora and a single tree. Stern but not defensive, the figure reiterates the West German abortion rhetoric of the 1970s, and in this way speaks for both her East and West German sisters. Her posture and the land

beneath her feet give the impression that this woman is standing on the planet itself, echoing the authority and control that is repeated in the poster's language, a key slogan of the time: "Mein Bauch gehört mir!" ["My belly belongs to me!"]

Once again commissioned by the Independent Women's Association, Feuchtenberger's poster reflects the idealistic assumptions of the 1990 election, when East German women thought they had control of their own future. The right to "Selbstbestimmung" ["self-determination"] expressed on this poster therefore extends well beyond the belly represented and onto the Women's Movement itself. Feminist activists performed their due diligence in rallying against unification, but mistakenly, they also considered unification an unlikely possibility, unable to foresee a possible future in which their perceived human rights could be discarded by a new government.

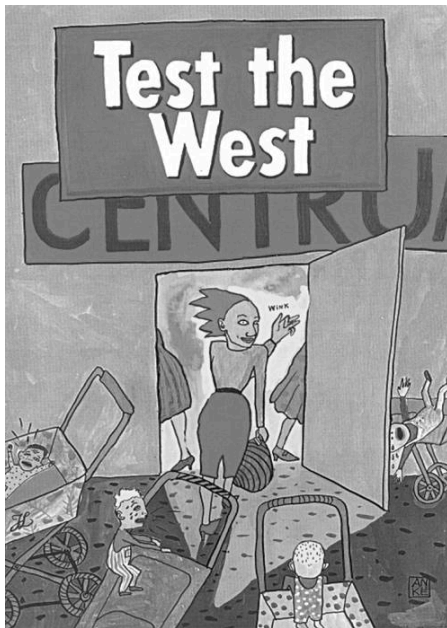


Fig. 2.6: Feuchtenberger, "Test the West," in *Ypsilon* (Berlin: BasisDruck Verlag, 1990), inside the backcover.



Fig. 2.7: "Test the West" Advertisement, West Cigarettes, c. 1990.

Feuchtenberger's contribution to the inaugural issue of the feminist magazine *Ypsilon*, "Test the West," looks at the flipside of unification activism and expresses the East German feminist skepticism of the West German system particularly well (fig. 2.6). Here, Feuchtenberger adopts the rhetoric of a West Cigarettes advertising campaign that emerged alongside German unification and came to symbolize both the changes in the East German landscape as well as popular sentiment (fig. 2.7). "Test the West" both encouraged East Germans to try out the cigarette brand, while also urging them to try out the western system. Yet it also served as a constant reminder of emergent capitalism in former East Germany, as advertising posters began to appear all over public spaces.

In Feuchtenberger's rendition of "Test[ing] the West," a female figure stands centrally with upward-moving, free-flowing hair, visual iconography consistent with much of her posters during this period. The woman, clearly a mother, enters a shopping center, but the German word "Centrum" is obscured by a caption that reads "Test the West." Reminiscent of the practice of pasting posters around the city and with its situation in a feminist magazine, this statement automatically signals a political intervention. The figure has her back to the viewer, but looking over her shoulder, she acknowledges both her observer and the children sitting in baby carriages. Here, Feuchtenberger references a common practice among East German mothers, who left their children outside stores while shopping. Since baby carriages were large, shops were crowded, and the fear of baby snatching was nonexistent, mothers could leave their children unattended while they shopped. Feuchtenberger, however, is not suggesting that East German women are able to transfer this practice to West German soil. The image is in fact a satirical rejection of western consumer culture, where the message reads, as



Elizabeth Mittman observes, that “real” East German mothers would not desert their children to try out capitalism’s consumer paradise.<sup>246</sup>

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By the first East German democratic election in March 1990, the illusion of political reform was shattered by a vote in favor of unification, when the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), the Federal Republic’s political party that had been advocating for unification, won by a large margin.<sup>247</sup> Instead of East German reform, or even an amendment of the West German constitution, the German Democratic Republic was simply dissolved and its lands adopted as the five new states of the unchanged political system of the Federal Republic, rendering all efforts by the Independent Women’s Movement moot.<sup>248</sup>

Navigating this new system was challenging to say the least, and few of the attempted reforms of the East German Women’s Movement had any impact on the future political process.<sup>249</sup> Women were no longer defined as an important voting bloc, which made efforts to put feminist issues on the national agenda increasingly unsuccessful. Furthermore, the first unification treaty mentioned women only once. In a clause that aligned them with the handicapped, women’s “special needs” were only vaguely recognized.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Mittman, "Gender, citizenship, and the public sphere in postunification Germany," 778-779.

<sup>247</sup> Brigitte Young, *Triumph of the fatherland: German unification and the marginalization of women* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>248</sup> Ferree and Brigitte Young, "Three Steps Back for Women: German Unification, Gender, and University 'Reform'," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 26, no. 2 (1993): 199.

<sup>249</sup> Mittman, "Gender, citizenship, and the public sphere in postunification Germany," 761.

<sup>250</sup> Ferree, "The rise and fall of" mommy politics," 100.

The most dramatic adjustment for East German women after unification, however, was the conditions for combining paid employment with unpaid labor in the home.<sup>251</sup> The West German system sought to phase out parental leaves, subsidies for childcare, and no fault divorce, only offering temporary arrangements to transition East German women out of East German institutionalized support systems.<sup>252</sup> The conservative federal government opposed the idea of childcare as a basic social right and ended federal subsidies in July 1991. State and local funding for East German childcare centers continued, but mothers of young children were caught in a vicious circle: women who lost their jobs could no longer afford to pay the now-higher daycare costs and therefore removed their children from childcare, which resulted in centers closing due to insufficient demand, leaving mothers consequently defined as "unavailable to work" because they no longer had childcare.<sup>253</sup> Official unemployment rates underrepresented the extent of the problem, in part because many women were not formally terminated but, with their actual work hours decreased to zero, were counted as having only reduced employment, and mothers without childcare were not officially considered unemployed.

Despite these biases, even the official statistics illustrated that women were more likely to lose their jobs and less likely to acquire new employment.<sup>254</sup> In July 1991, the official East German unemployment rate was fourteen percent for women and ten percent for men, but by October 1991, women were already sixty-one percent of all unemployed East Germans.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>252</sup> Ferree and Young, "Three Steps Back for Women," 199.

<sup>253</sup> Ferree, "The rise and fall of 'mommy politics'," 105.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 103.

Ultimately, East German women found themselves in a social system structured completely differently from the one in which they had taken their jobs (ninety-one percent were in the labor force), had their children (ninety-one percent had at least one child), divorced their husbands (thirty-eight percent of all marriages ended in divorce), or chose not to marry at all (twenty-nine percent of women aged eighteen to forty).<sup>256</sup> Transitional arrangements were no substitute for the support East German women had under socialism, and eventually, East German wives, mothers and female workers were left without their accustomed social, economic and ideological support altogether. The unstoppable momentum towards unification arrested early feminist reform efforts, and East German women were left without a political voice on the margins of West German party politics. Furthermore, feminist activists efforts to find an alternative to the East German "mommy politics" were supplanted by a defensive struggle to maintain the employment and reproductive rights to which they had grown accustomed.<sup>257</sup> Consequently, it is not hard to see how East German women lost in the shift to unification.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Ferree and Young, "Three Steps Back for Women," 199.

<sup>257</sup> Ferree, "The rise and fall of 'mommy politics'," 103.

<sup>258</sup> Ferree and Young, "Three Steps Back for Women," 199.

## Feuchtenberger's Graphic Art after German Unification



Fig. 2.8: Feuchtenberger, Kongress - Wi(e)der die Vereinzelung [Congress - “Again(st) the Separation”], commissioned by the Independent Women’s Association, 1993.

Fig. 2.9: Feuchtenberger, “Wer war Frau Lilienthal?” [“Who was Mrs. Lilienthal?”], commissioned and rejected by the *Heimatsmuseum*, Anklam; used by the Independent Women’s Association and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, ca. 1996.

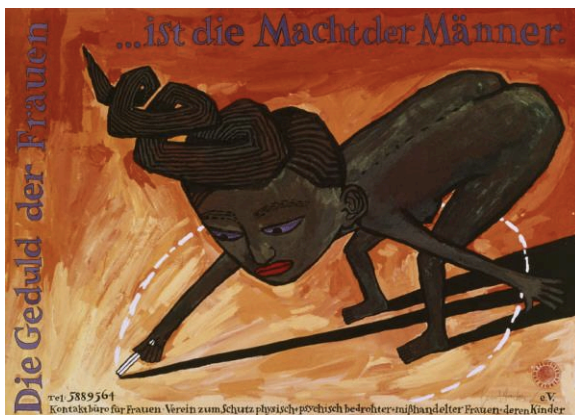


Fig. 2.10: Feuchtenberger, “Die Geduld der Frauen ...ist die Macht der Männer” [“The Patience of Women... ist the Power of Men”], commissioned by Kontaktbüro für Frauen, ca. 1995.

Fig. 2.11: Feuchtenberger, “EWA-Frauenzentrum, Prenzlauer Allee” [“EWA-Women’s Center, Prenzlauer Allee”], commissioned by the EWA-Frauenzentrum, ca. 1995.

The failures of the Women’s Movement disillusioned Feuchtenberger as it did East German feminists in general, and after the vote to unify, both Feuchtenberger’s

posters as well as the movement in general moved in a different direction.<sup>259</sup> This begs the questions, what effect did unification have on Feuchtenberger's work? Unlike the utopian ideals expressed in her earlier work, Feuchtenberger's feminist posters after 1990 express the frustration and demoralization that the political process inevitably brought with it. The colors became darker and denser and the space more constricted. The representation of a central female figure remained consistent, but how Feuchtenberger represented her – and continued to do so for much of her subsequent artistic production – changed fundamentally. The artist's line work became tighter and cleaner, and the central female figure's facial expression, especially her eyes had hardened. She had become stony, perhaps to impart this new sense of disillusionment.

Feuchtenberger's poster "Again(st) the Separation" (fig. 2.8) is a particularly good example of this development. Also commissioned by the Independent Women's Association, this poster was produced in 1993 for the German-wide Women's Congress, which took place between June 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in Berlin in hopes of determining the future of German feminist activism.<sup>260</sup> When comparing it to the posters Feuchtenberger produced before the March elections of 1990, there are several important differences.

While still depicted in purple, engaging the color of the East German Women's Movement, the nudity of Feuchtenberger's pre-unification posters is masked by constrictive masculine clothing, as the female protagonist sits upon a football, a typically masculine sport. On the one hand, the football metaphor functions as a criticism of the strategies of the East German Women's Movement, whose game plan to separate and

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<sup>259</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014.

<sup>260</sup> Annette Männel, "Frauen sind mütig, stark und schön," *Weiblick* 12 (1993): 32.

dominate ultimately maneuvered them offside.<sup>261</sup> Alternatively, it could also be referencing the German win of 1990 World Cup and ambivalence about the “united” German football team, which was in fact only the West German team now competing on behalf of both East and West. Here, German unification once again had manifested as the maintenance of the West German tradition via the subversion of East German identity and actual unity. The sentiment of the tagline reiterates this skepticism. “Again(st) the Separation” alludes simultaneously to both the ambivalence towards unification as well as the division that existed in the Women’s Movement after the unification vote. Furthermore, the fact that the central figure is smoking, directly engaging capitalist consumer culture – and perhaps Feuchtenberger’s early “Test the West” image – again references the most visible difference in East Germany after the Wall came down, the commercial advertising that appeared everywhere and specifically, the cigarettes ads.

In a second poster by Feuchtenberger for the Independent Women’s Association produced around the same time, a similar ambivalence towards the evolution of united German politics is expressed. Engaging the biography of German aviation pioneer and East and West German icon Otto Lilienthal (1848-1896), “Who was Mrs. Lilienthal?” (fig. 2.9) presents his wife, Agnes Lilienthal, back at the stove – a visual manifestation of the association’s pre-unification warning – as her children, no longer in childcare but dressed in uniforms resembling those of the East German youth group, the *Junge Pioniere* (Young Pioneers), crawl around her feet.<sup>262</sup> The tone of these posters is decidedly more ambivalent than Feuchtenberger’s earlier work. All traces of the idealism

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<sup>261</sup> Andrea von Hegel, “Stark und schön: Politische Plakate und Zeichnungen von Anke Feuchtenberger,” in *Die Lawine von morgen und der Schnee von gestern*, eds. Manfred Butzmann and Richard Grübling (Berlin-Neukölln: Kunstamt Neukölln, 2003), 32.

<sup>262</sup> A 5-Mark coin was released in celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Otto Lilienthal’s birth in 1973, and two stamps were released in February 1990 commemorating Lilienthal’s achievements.



that existed in her pre-unification posters for the Independent Women's Associations have disappeared and been replaced by ambivalent and skeptical visual engagements with unification and subtle critiques of united German politics.

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The most recognizable change in Feuchtenberger's pre- to post-unification female figures, however, is the binding of her protagonist's free-flowing hair (compare fig. 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 to fig. 2.8, 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11). Either wound up into a spiral or confined under a scarf, I read this development as a visual marker for the constrictions West German society placed upon East German women. It was also, however, the moment that Feuchtenberger inserted herself into these debates. As an icon of unification, Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired protagonist became a symbol for the feminist politics of the Independent Women's Association, advocating for the rights of women on posters across Berlin, but she was also a representation of Feuchtenberger herself.<sup>263</sup> Her comics of this period incorporated the same figure, but while her posters engaged in public discourses on feminist politics, her comics were a personal reflection on the gender politics of unified Germany, interrogating its contradictions and patriarchal power structures.

Like the women of her posters, Feuchtenberger found it difficult to acclimate to Western living. When she arrived in West Berlin, Feuchtenberger was confronted by a cultural landscape that was "absolutely determined by men."<sup>264</sup> While artistic production in East Germany was also unequivocally male-dominated, the gender norms that Feuchtenberger encountered in West Berlin extended well beyond the mere fact that more

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<sup>263</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014.

<sup>264</sup> Feuchtenberger, interview by Anette Selg, "Eine Instanz in der deutschen Comic-Szene," n.p.

men were active in the arts. Gender equality was an entirely different project on the other side of the Berlin Wall, and as a mother and artist, Feuchtenberger felt this difference immediately and found it difficult to assert herself as a woman.<sup>265</sup>

Therefore, beyond dissecting the hypocrisies of gender norms in contemporary Germany, I read Feuchtenberger's comics as a specifically East German critique of West German hegemony and its sustained patriarchy in united Germany, incorporating the politics of Feuchtenberger's feminist activism innately. *Die Biographie der Frau Trockenthal* (1999) is an excellent example of this, in which Feuchtenberger sets many of her political and theater posters into a biographical story about Frau Trockenthal (Ms. Dry-Valley). A play on her own name, Feuchtenberger (Damp-Mountain), this story situates the artist's life within the politics of the period, while also rendering the artist herself a symbol for all East German women of the time.

In line with Hilary Chute's analysis of feminine autobiography's idiom of witness, Feuchtenberger sets up a visual language of self-representation "in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form."<sup>266</sup> Dealing more with intimate relationships than public debates on gender equality, Feuchtenberger's comics examine the power dynamics that exist between men and woman but from an autobiographical perspective. Her work is easily situated within confines of Chute's project, and Feuchtenberger joins other feminist graphic narrators such as Linda Barry, Alison Bechdel, Phoebe Gloeckner and Marjane Satrapi in her endeavor to represent the trauma of her childhood and adolescence but also of German

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

unification.<sup>267</sup> In both her political poster art and her comics, Feuchtenberger collapses the personal and the public, integrating herself into debates on women's rights and the post-unification politics of gender.

Feuchtenberger's use of herself as an extension and metaphor for all women produces intimate connections between object and viewer. Consequently, Feuchtenberger herself appeared around the city of Berlin fighting for the rights of East German women (fig. 2.8 and 2.9), inviting feminists to collect and collaborate in defining the gender dynamics of the future (fig. 2.11) and expressing skepticism over unification (fig. 2.8), while within her comics, she investigated similar structures of patriarchal oppression but on a very personal level. These references stack on top of each other to developing layered supplemental meanings to Feuchtenberger's work, which are at once personal as well as political, private as well as public.

Populating many of her posters (fig. 2.8 and 2.10), Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired protagonist was also featured in many of her early comics. First presented in her independent publication by Martin Barber in 1993, *Herzhaft und Lebenslänglich*, as part of *Crunch*, a series of four publications to introduce East German comics artists into the West German comics scene, Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired figure also appeared as the protagonist in several of the comics in her first official publication, *Mutterkuchen* (1994), by Jochen Enterprises.<sup>268</sup> The introductory narrative situates her as the female counterpart

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<sup>267</sup> Several stories in Feuchtenberger's *Mutterkuchen* recount the traumatic relationships the artist had with her mother and men. Allusions to rape and betrayal are also not uncommon in her work, and some of her more recent work, "Neuigkeiten aus der Alten Schule" (2009), "Effi redet Blech" (2013), and "Ein deutsches Tier im deutschen Wald" (2013) specifically, delves into the intimate details of her life in East Germany, Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014.

<sup>268</sup> The spiral-haired protagonist is featured in "Die Studel Petra," "Living next door to Alice," "die Geburt der Helvetica" and "Nacht über Bärmi und Klett" in *Mutterkuchen* as well as in two of the other episodes of the "Bärmi und Klett," series among others. The other artists were East German graphic artists ATAK and Holger Fickelscherer and Swiss comics artist M.S. Bastian.

to Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*, "Die Strudel Petra," in which Feuchtenberger aphoristically and autobiographically explores the contractions between her feminine sexuality and the expectations of femininity and womanhood imposed on girls by society, and specifically, her mother.

The story opens to a half-page title panel in which a spiral-haired female figure sits half-submerged in a similarly spiraled pattern of intersecting oblong circles (fig. 12). Her hair interrupts the story's title, "Die Strudel Petra," which also functions in naming the protagonist. The title immediately references Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter*, situating Feuchtenberger's work in the context of the development of the German-speaking iteration of the comics medium in general as well as within discourses of morality, patriarchy and socially defined conventions of appropriate behavior. However, "Die Strudel Petra" is less about the history of the medium than archaic discourses of morality but only as they pertain to little girls instead little boys, ultimately critiquing contemporary gender politics.<sup>269</sup>

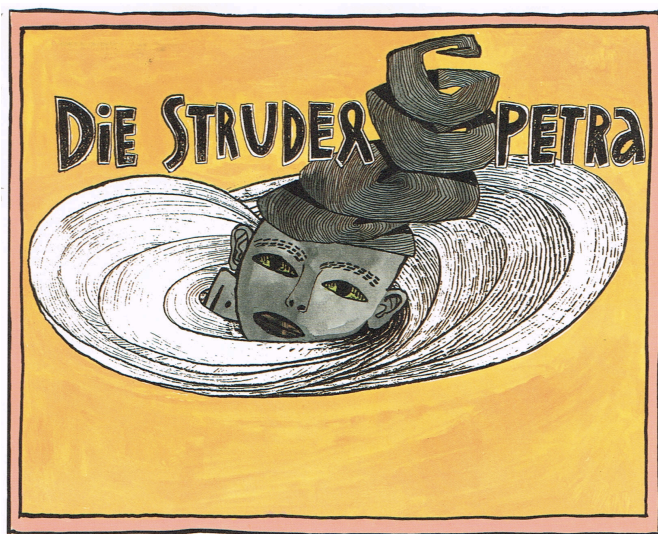


Fig. 2.12: Feuchtenberger, "Die Strudel Petra," n.p.

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<sup>269</sup> Feuchtenberger in conversation with the author, June 2014

The narrative unfolds through aphoristic observations that populate the upper quarter of the panels. The statements, usually spanning the width of the static panels, present observations on “problem” daughters followed by a second panel offering a “solution.” The problems, however, are very removed from the everyday, emphasizing Feuchtenberger’s interest on the absurd and morbid. The pairing adopts the language of western consumerism and is reminiscent of commercial advertising strategies, perhaps once again referring to unification politics, where a problem that is not really a problem is solved with a gimmick-like solution. Feuchtenberger uses common expressions and phrases, rendering them literal within the panel to undermine their figurative meanings, and thereby constructs a critique of popular concepts of femininity. The panels below, for example, play with the imagery and language of the classic magic trick of sawing a woman in half (*Zersägte Jungfrau*) (fig. 2.14). The artist adapts the illusion and renders it literal by presenting the viewer with a female body divided into three boxed pieces. Instead of referencing the magic trick directly, however, the captions engage the language of the illusion to make another statement about female sexuality.

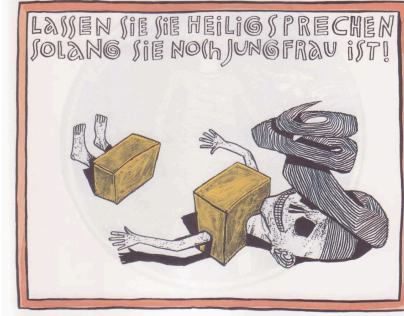
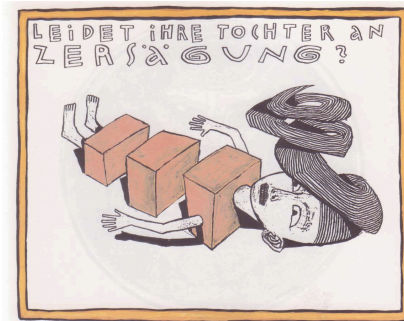
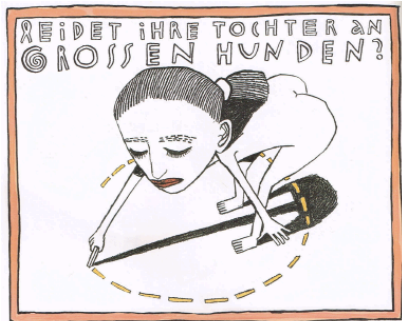


Fig. 2.13: Feuchtenberger, “Strudel Petra,” 5.

Fig. 2.14: Feuchtenberger, “Strudel Petra,” 12.

In the final two panels of the story, Strudel Petra stares out at the viewer as she lies upside down positioned diagonally along the picture plane with her head inclined towards the lower right corner of the panel (fig. 2.14). The narrator poses a question: “Leidet Ihre Tochter an Zersägung?” [“Does your daughter suffer from sawing?”]. While it is clear by the imagery and verb stem that *Zersägung* is the nominalization of the verb *zersägen*, to saw, it is not a word already in existence in the German language. With the assistance of the following panel, however, where the narrator provides a “solution” to this metaphorical conundrum, “Lassen Sie sie heiligsprechen, solange sie noch Jungfrau ist!” [“Let her be canonized as long as she is a virgin!”], the viewer finds other meanings within the word *Zersägung* that parallel the overt reference to sawing.

In the second panel, the center piece of the daughter’s partitioned body has been removed, and she lies there as the skeleton of her former self, eye sockets empty but still staring off out of the picture plane and towards the viewer. Feuchtenberger has acted out



the illusion literally, and the consequences of actually sawing a woman in half are presented upon the page. However, the caption makes it clear that these two panels are about more than the literal representation of a classic magic trick. Feuchtenberger engages the illusion not to conjure up magic-show imagery but to highlight hypocrisies in the perception of female sexuality. As a *Jungfrau*, a virgin, this daughter is perceived as holy or saintly, and as such, her virginity is the centerpiece of her identity. However, the moment that this piece of her is removed, the daughter has fallen out of her former saintliness and is left, morally tainted, to decay outside the parameters of acceptable feminine sexuality. *Zersägung* is thereby rendered a euphemism for sex, adding supplementary meaning to the initial panel, and the combination of the two becomes a critique of the value of childhood innocence and female virginity.

While “Die Strudel Petra” was also based on Feuchtenberger’s relationship with her own mother, and thus an attempt to process that reportedly painful familial connection, the artist’s personal experiences are abstracted through simplistic imagery and aphoristic language with little trace of autobiography remaining.<sup>270</sup> Instead, the issues presented in Feuchtenberger’s “Die Strudel Petra” become universal problems of subjectivity and individuality, illustrating the artist’s belief that society does not allow women to feel, fear or be passionate in the same way as men. By 1994, Feuchtenberger’s feminist politics had transitioned from the project of the East German Women’s Movement to a more personal enterprise on dissecting the contradictions of feminine sexuality. The underlying theme, however, remained the same: gender inequality.

Reinforcing this interpretation and augmenting Feuchtenberger’s understanding of gender equality is a publication written by Volker Zastrow and illustrated by

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<sup>270</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014.

Feuchtenberger. Entitled *Gender – Politische Geschlechtsumwandlung* (2006), the subject of the two essays originally published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper is a critique of gender mainstreaming. The polemic focuses on gender equality, understood not as the *identical* treatment of men and women but rather as their *equal* treatment with consideration of their biological differences. Essential in this debate is the fair treatment of women as mothers, and here is where Feuchtenberger's East German feminist politics return. Based on a notion of gender as entirely learned, Zastrow criticizes gender mainstreaming legislation as ineffective, claiming that it does not properly address the needs of women and mothers.<sup>271</sup> His opening argument, which points out how the majority of mothers wish to only work part-time, observes how gender mainstreaming policy works towards the opposite, endeavoring to facilitate the full employment of both men and women. The idea behind gender mainstreaming is certainly designed to support feminist efforts, but in Zastrow's opinion, the policy that should enforce equality sometimes seems to do the opposite.

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<sup>271</sup> Volker Zastrow, *Gender: Politische Geschlechtsumwandlung* (Leipzig: Manuscriptum, 2006), 7-8. Gender mainstreaming is a concept first proposed in 1985, which sought to achieve gender equality by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. This concept of gender equality is not limited to formal equality, it includes as well equality de facto, which is a more holistic approach to gender policy in order to tackle the interconnected causes that create an unequal relationship between the sexes in all areas of life – work, politics, sexuality, culture, and violence.



Fig. 2.15: Feuchtenberger, *Schnabeltier* [“Platypus”], in Volker Zastrow’s *Gender - Politische Geschlechtsumwandlung* (Leipzig: Manuscriptum, 2006), 10.

While Feuchtenberger does not contribute verbally to the Zastrow’s essay, her support is expressed visually in a series of six surrealist illustrations advocating for the needs of women and mothers.<sup>272</sup> Through dreamlike interpretations of contemporary gender dynamics, Feuchtenberger’s black and white images slip into metaphor and fantasy to elaborate on Zastrow’s polemic. The first image, for example, a platypus preparing to dress presumably a child (fig. 2.15), reinforces the complicated notions on gender Zastrow explores in his essays. Unlike other mammals, which have two sex chromosomes, the platypus has ten. Typically, the inheritance of double X chromosomes makes females, while inheriting a Y chromosome produces males, but the platypus is an oddity of nature. With ten sex chromosomes, which link up into five chromosomal pairs, there is theoretically the possibility of twenty-five sexes, though researches have stated

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<sup>272</sup> Feuchtenberger has since distanced herself from Zastrow’s text, Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014; however, the type of feminism expressed in it is very similar to that of her *Hure H* series, as discussed in Chapter Four. A close reading of both texts would suggest that her beliefs were aligned with Zastrow’s at the time of *Gender - Politische Geschlechtsumwandlung*’s publication even if she no longer believes the statements within that text continue to resonate with her and her work.

that in reality this does not occur.<sup>273</sup> Feuchtenberger's appropriation of the platypus' mysterious gender situation, where twenty-five sexes are possible, but only male and female exist, is a gesture in support of Zastrow's attempt to debunk the myth of gender as *entirely* learned and performative.

Much of Feuchtenberger's work, including a number of publications that directly thematize female sexuality, patriarchy and masculine violence, such as the *W the Whore* series she coproduced with author Katrin de Vries (1999, 2000, 2003), are temporally and bibliographically framed by similar feminist politics. While Zastrow's polemic on the biologically determined needs of women and mothers may sound contentious in terms of gender and queer theory, it is not unlike the rights that East German activists were fighting to maintain after the vote for unification in 1990. Reading the same critic of contemporary (read West German) gender politics into the rest of her comics production is therefore only a logical extension.

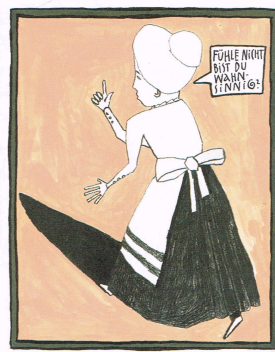


Fig. 2.16: Feuchtenberger, "Auszug aus dem Märchen" ["Departure from the Fairy Tale"], 1993.

Fig. 2.17: Feuchtenberger, "Die Strudel Petra," n.p.

<sup>273</sup> Jocelyn Selim, "Sex, Ys, and Platypuses." *Discover*, April 25, 2005, [discovermagazine.com/2005/apr/sex-ys-platypuses0425](http://discovermagazine.com/2005/apr/sex-ys-platypuses0425); Ian Sample, "Platypus proves even odder than scientists thought," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2008, [www.theguardian.com/science/2008/may/08/genetics.wildlife](http://www.theguardian.com/science/2008/may/08/genetics.wildlife).

Important in the context of this analysis are the visual relationships that the artist develops between her poster art and her comics, an aspect of Feuchtenberger's work I also examine in Chapter Two. Beyond the reoccurrence of Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired self, other correlations exist between Feuchtenberger's media. To return to the two texts examine in the previous chapter, the exchange that occurs in the opening panels of "Die Strudel Petra" (fig. 2.17) also takes place on one of Feuchtenberger's theater posters produced around 1993, "Auszug aus dem Märchen" ["Departure from the Fairy Tale"] (fig. 2.16). Once again, Feuchtenberger references fairytales, but this poster engages that mythology very differently than her representation of the Princess and the Frog (fig. 2.1). Instead of tapping into the archetypes of the fairytale world, the subject of the play is the genre in general, but both gestures are equally consistent with East German narrative strategies. Due to the GDR's strict censorship laws, artists often engaged myth and fairytale to comment on state politics while circumventing its restrictions. This strategy, which appears pronounced in Feuchtenberger's poster for the Independent Women's Association (fig. 2.1), is a much more subtle political intervention in the poster for "Departure from the Fairy Tale," primarily located in the paralleling of the speech balloons between the poster and "Die Strudel Petra."

Directed by Gabriele Hänel and featuring Maria Erforth, and Günther Lindner as its two protagonists, there is very little that remains of the content of "Auszug aus dem Märchen." The archive of Theater o. N., formerly Zinnober, the East German theater house founded in 1979, however, provides a brief synopsis of the work: "Ein Mann und eine Frau in der Stadt. Frieder und Katherlieschen. Maria und Joseph. Ein steppender Maler beim Grundieren. Ein Dirigent als verstimmtes Familienorchester. Aus Alp und

Wunsch wird Traumtanz.”<sup>274</sup> While the description provides little insight into the play’s content, the two allusions to other narratives offer avenues for the interpretation of the play’s themes.

The story of Mary and Joseph is naturally the more well known of the two, referencing Christian mythology through the account of the birth of Jesus. Here, however, I shall focus on the more esoteric reference, *Der Frieder und das Katherlieschen* (1819) by the Brothers Grimm, which tells the story of a man and wife with typically gendered domestic roles.

In *Der Frieder und das Katherlieschen*, the husband, Frieder, goes out to the field and demands that his wife have a fried sausage and beverage prepared for him upon his return. His wife, Katherlieschen, ever wanting to please her husband, sets out to be the perfect housewife, only to miscalculate every step of the way in preparing her husband’s meal and chaos ensues. Like Feuchtenberger’s “Die Strudel Petra,” Katherlieschen takes everything too literally, and in the process of doing *exactly* what Frieder instructs, does the complete opposite.

A pivotal point for the purposes of the comparison is the moment in which Katherlieschen awakes from a nap in the field. Having mistakenly cut up all her clothing, she does not recognize herself and asks: “Bin ich's oder bin ich's nicht? Ach, ich bin's nicht!” [Am I her or am I not her? Oh, I’m not her!"] Having decided that she is not in fact herself, she runs home to confirm her suspicion with her husband. Through the window, she asks Frieder if Katherlieschen is home. Her husband, assuming that Katherlieschen is asleep in the house but without confirming it, responds that his wife is most certainly at home. Katherlieschen is satisfied having verified her assumption that

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<sup>274</sup> “Archiv,” *Theater o.N.*, [www.ton.ahornblau.com](http://www.ton.ahornblau.com).



she is “gewiss schon zu Haus” [“certainly already home”] and runs off to join a band of thieves.<sup>275</sup>

Incorporating a reference to the tale of Frieder und das Katherlieschen into the synopsis of the play, and therefore into the theater poster, parallels Feuchtenberger’s interests in gender dynamics and the same questions of identity explored in her comics. Katherlieschen’s subjectivity is constructed by the expectations of her husband and her domestic role as a wife to the point of self-negation. When she doesn’t recognize herself because she no longer looks like a wife with her clothing torn. Instead of trusting in her sense of self, she seeks confirmation of her identity through her husband, who mistakenly assumes that the woman at the window is not his wife because his wife would already be home.

The disconnect between authentic female subjectivity, as experienced by individual women, and established typically feminine gender roles is further highlighted in the dialog of the poster, which as a mirror of the dialog in “Die Strudel Petra” is supplemented by the meanings constructed within the comics’ panels. However, while the dialog that occurs in “Die Strudel Petra” is identical, Feuchtenberger alters the context of the exchange through the figures. Instead of presenting the reader with a mother and child, as Feuchtenberger does with her comic, the poster depicts a man and woman, both complicating the conversation in the comic and adding a new dimension to the gender politics of the play. Mirroring the exchange between mother and child in “Die Strudel Petra,” the woman utters mid gait “Ich fühle” [“I feel”], suggesting both a physical ability to touch oneself and the physical sensation of feeling touch itself, while

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<sup>275</sup> Brüder Grimm, “Der Frieder und das Katherlieschen,” *Grimms Märchen*, [www.grimmstories.com/de/grimm\\_maerchen/der\\_frieder\\_und\\_das\\_katherlieschen](http://www.grimmstories.com/de/grimm_maerchen/der_frieder_und_das_katherlieschen).

also implying masturbation and an ability to feel emotion, to which the man responds “Fühle nicht! Bist du wahnsinnig?” [“Don’t feel! Are you crazy?”].

Changing the genders of the two figures reinforces the critique of the expectations of feminine sexuality constructed in Feuchtenberger’s comic. Furthermore, that the spiral-haired protagonist is also taken directly out of Feuchtenberger’s comics draws a second direct connection between the narrative of “Die Strudel Petra” and the story of the play. The Strudel Petra of “Departure from the Fairy Tale’s” theater poster is all grown up, which renders Feuchtenberger’s interpretation of the play as an extension of Strudel Petra’s childhood narrative. To take this interpretation one step further, the suppression of female sexual expression and feminine subjectivity therefore begins at home during childhood through oppressive mothers and societal expectation and continues on through the established patriarchy of adult gender dynamics.<sup>276</sup>

The interconnection that exists between Feuchtenberger’s posters and graphic literature infuses the stories represented with the gender politics of the other media. Only in returning the history and aesthetics of the artist’s feminist activism to a reading of her comics does an understanding of the politics of Feuchtenberger’s graphic narrative emerge. This is an endeavor that I continue in Chapter Three, where I focus exclusively on *Mutterkuchen* and Feuchtenberger’s development of feminist form of graphic expression. Finding the feminist icons of German unification also across the panels of Feuchtenberger’s work imbues the stories with layers of these politics to be decoded. Feuchtenberger’s comics’ engagement with concepts of femininity and her

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<sup>276</sup> Other examples of comparison between Feuchtenberger’s comics and her poster work emerge upon closer examination, both specific and general. She uses the same visual strategy of the protagonist drawing a circle around herself as a symbol of security in both “Die Strudel Petra” (fig. 2.13) and her poster for the Kontaktbüro für Frauen (fig. 2.10), while her use of speech balloons (fig. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.16), symbols (tigers, gardens and fairy tales), iconic visual vocabulary and distinctive font also connect her graphic art.

deconstruction of notions of female sexuality and gender worked in collaboration with her feminist activism in the early 1990s, and her use of the same characters, themes and dialog across her artistic production introduced a political dimension to German-speaking comics that had previously existed only on the fringes of the genre.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Feminist Graphic Expression of Anke Feuchtenberger's *Mutterkuchen*

She refuses to be the site of another's desire and reflects back to you the insubstantiality of your projections. (Rosy Martin, *The Art of Reflection*, xvi)

She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history. (Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," 880)

As indicated in Chapter Two, Feuchtenberger's first publication, *Mutterkuchen* (1995) by Jochen Enterprises (fig. 3.1), is an important text in Feuchtenberger's work that not only collects the artist's initial experiments in the comics medium; it also illustrates the inward turn of Feuchtenberger's feminism that began with the East German Women's Movement. Moreover, it is in *Mutterkuchen* that Feuchtenberger lays out the terms of her engagement with patriarchal master narratives and the iconography of that project, which in turn lends insight to her later work. A collection of nine stories produced between her adoption of the comics medium and its publication, *Mutterkuchen* is the artist's most aggressive, candid and unpolished work. However, it also signals the beginning of Feuchtenberger's move to producing art for private consumption.

After her disillusionment with the political process in her collaboration with feminist and activist groups before and during German unification, Feuchtenberger's art turned away from public political discourse, as she began to investigate similar issues of

gender dynamics through graphic narrative. The texts within *Mutterkuchen* still also engage German politics, as I demonstrate in Chapter Two, with her spiral-haired protagonist functioning as a self-representation as well as a *Kunstfigur* that populated Feuchtenberger's posters and her graphic narratives throughout the 1990s. Through this character, Feuchtenberger creates a bridge between the two spheres of her artistic production, rendering *Mutterkuchen* the continuation of the political activism and gender critique the artist began with the East German Women's Movement in paneled anecdotes on the struggles of her spiral-haired self-representation.

Through content and form *Mutterkuchen* engages similar questions to those Feuchtenberger already explored in her political posters but in a radically different aesthetic manner. Rife with complex metaphors and innovative narrative strategies, *Mutterkuchen* is Feuchtenberger's first engagement in the comics medium with many of the subjects that remain focal points throughout her career. Foregrounding her concern with the female body and matters of gender relations, *Mutterkuchen* functions as a prequel to her and Katrin de Vries's *Die Hure H* series, offering a space in which Feuchtenberger's art speaks solely from the author's perspective on the subject of female sexuality and lending interpretive power to her later art. The volume therefore acts as a prism for her work, distilling many of her subjects into their purest forms.

The narratives thematize tropes of masculine oppression, but by embracing feminine sexuality and subjectivity, Feuchtenberger's art subverts dominant patriarchal paradigms. She gives power to the female voice through the inventive application of word-image relationships. Furthermore, by integrating narrative techniques that draw attention to the female body in the writing practice, the violence of language, which

marks the body of her spiral-haired protagonist, and the ambivalence of hegemonic myths of womanhood and femininity, Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives subvert masculine tropes through the deconstruction of the sign, signifier and signified in the semiology of gender. Feuchtenberger thereby develops an intertextual mode of feminist graphic narration that draws on myth and fairytales to retell patriarchal master narratives through a feminist lens. In "Die Strudel Petra," Feuchtenberger rewrites Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter*, casting a young girl in the role of the archetypal troublemaker; In "Living next door to Alice," she retells *Alice in Wonderland* from the perspective of the classic children's story's namesake, Alice Liddell; and in an untitled graphic narrative that I refer to as "Marian la Luna und der Gottvater," she rewrites the origin story of the Christian faith and recasts the Fall of Man as the Fall of Woman.

While the graphic narratives of *Mutterkuchen* are presented individually, and were not intended to be read together, the parallels between the stories also suggest that *Mutterkuchen* presents a single story featuring the same protagonist under different names.<sup>277</sup> The repeated appearance of Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired *Kunstfigur* lends itself well to a reading of all of these early stories as part of the same narrative, in which Feuchtenberger herself explores tropes of womanhood, feminine subjectivity, maternity, and birth.

These graphic narratives are depicted comic form, but they are much more complicated than that category of representation implies, integrating new and inventive forms of narration that draw from art history and literature in an unconventional way. Some of these graphic narratives feature only a single panel, while others span across pages. Some embrace traditional forms of comics narration, moving between moments as

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<sup>277</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2016.



the reader moves between paneled scenes, while others exist outside of time and space altogether or present events separated by an unspecified amount of time. Furthermore, Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives do not adopt a conventional understanding of closure. As argued most notably by Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics*, that which is represented in the comics frame is just as important as that which is not, and it is between the panels, in the gutter, where the reader intellectually stitches the moments represented together to produce the narrative, thereby creating closure and constructing meaning. However, as Francesca Lyn argues in her dissertation on female autobiography, closure is not the ultimate goal for some comics artists.<sup>278</sup> Instead, it is the fragmentation of the medium and its disparate panels that represent some forms of experience better than others.

While Lyn argues that the fragmented nature of comics lends itself well to the representation of traumatic experience and women's autobiography, what occurs between Feuchtenberger's panels is not easily reduced to any one strategy. Like trauma, Feuchtenberger's fragmentation exists to represent experience that cannot be reconciled, but she also uses it to produce a distancing between panels that works consciously to disrupt the temporal and spatial flow of images. In other words, while her panels are positioned sequentially on the page and within the collection of stories, not all of the images necessitate sequential reading and even push back against McCloud's concept of closure. In fact, many of the panels of Feuchtenberger's comics bear only thematic relationships, offering content that is spatially and temporally unrelated from panel to panel. Furthermore, the way in which Feuchtenberger's self-referential artistic production

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<sup>278</sup> Francesca Lyn, "Draw Your Demons: Identity, Humor, and Trauma in Autobiographical Comics by Women of Color" (presentation, International Comic Arts Forum, Columbia, SC, April 14, 2016).

is self-reflexive and speaks to itself adds a second layer to the impact of the comics' fragmentation Working again the disjuncture of fragmentation, the narrative's self-referentiality encourages the reader to make connections not only between the different panels of the graphic narratives, but also between the different stories within the volume as well as the different media with which she was working at the time, including political and theater posters. Feuchtenberger thereby builds an ever larger network of (self-)referential images and discourses that provides the connective tissue and potent grounding for myth, intertextual literariness and fantasy.

Lastly, Feuchtenberger alters the panel form to draw from art historical traditions, such as German expressionism and the medieval medallion or Renaissance tondo formats, integrating new formal techniques into the comics medium that add supplemental meanings to the content of her graphic narratives.

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Fig. 3.1: Feuchtenberger, *Mutterkuchen*, cover.



Fig. 3.2: Feuchtenberger, *Mutterkuchen*, title page.

The cover of the 9.25x6.5 inch publication opens to a page featuring the volume's spiral-haired protagonist crouching upright while giving birth to a second adult woman (fig. 3.2). The female figure presented mid-delivery features tightly curled hair and fully formed breasts as she gazes up to the protagonist and greets the woman with "Hi, MaMa!" Framed by stylized golden ovaries that decorate the back of the cover, this inverse birth both reinforces the theme of motherhood prevalent throughout the publication as well as plays with the volume's title. Absent of a title page, the reader perceives this image to be synonymous with the collection's title, adding another dimension to the term "Mutterkuchen," which is German for "afterbirth." However, instead of a placenta emerging from between the protagonist's legs, the image presents the reader with a birth scene, highlighting the significance of both mothers and childbirth in the stories to come while reinforcing a metaphorical reading of these scenes that would allow for very unconventional deliveries.

The subsequent nine stories follow without page numbers. They are differentiated through several title panels as well as by their coloring and the formal qualities of the graphic narratives. However, since the volume does not possess clear divisions between the comics, the stories can also be read as part of one book-length narrative united through similar protagonists, artistic styles, symbolism and thematic content.

For the purpose of this brief introduction, I will summarize the five graphic narratives I do not examine in detail later in the chapter, "Herzhaft Lebenslänglich," "living next door to Alice," "Erreger," "die Geburt der Helvetia" and "Nacht über Bärmi und Klett," and only provide brief sketches of "Strudel Petra," "Marian La Luna und der Gottvater," "Rosen" and "No Roses."

As briefly examined in Chapter Two, the first story, “Strudel Petra” features metaphorical conflicts between the spiral-haired protagonist and her mother. The language of this first comic stands out in the collection as it mimics the rhetoric of commercial advertising with each pair of half-page panels presenting a tableau of problem daughters and a gimmick-like solution. Instead of real issues, however, the graphic narrative presents the hypocrisies of society’s expectations of young women through the comics’ mother figure, which suggests a reading that women as well as men enact female oppression.

The second story, “Marian La Luna und der Gottvater,” dramatically changes the artistic style. While “Strudel Petra” featured colored, conventional rectangular panels, this second untitled graphic narrative takes place in black and white, rounded frames. In a series of twelve half-page circular panels, which resemble the format of both Renaissance circular paintings or tondos as well as the medallions of medieval illuminated manuscripts, the untitled comic recounts a revisionist parable of the Fall of Man, that, in fact, portrays the Fall of Woman, illustrating the archetypal events of female oppression in which God/Adam metaphorically suppresses Mary/Eve’s sexuality by beheading her serpent hair and clothing her naked body in order to subjugate her. Feuchtenberger thereby rewrites the story of original sin as a masculine offense.

The third and fourth graphic narratives work in tandem and return to a more conventional paneling style. In black and white, “Rosen” and “No Roses” tell the story of a woman and her lover, but they present two conflicting narratives on the relationship that offer insight into the ways in which the protagonist experiences masculine oppression through tropes of domesticity and tokens of romance.

The fifth comic takes its name from Feuchtenberger's 1993 independent publication edited by Martin Barber, ATAK's brother and early collaborator, "Herzhaft und Lebenslänglich." Its protagonist is differentiated from Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired figure through her diminutive size and utter hairlessness, but with the final panel of "No Roses" also featuring a woman with a shaved head, there also appears to be some continuity between the stories.

Across the single-page, six-panel graphic narrative, the figure wanders through a series of bodily organs. Beginning in the tongue, which she identifies with a caption that runs along the top of the panel as "Landzunge", meaning tongue or spit in a geographical sense, the protagonist continues to the windpipe, which is titled "Windkanal," meaning wind tunnel. At this point the reader realizes that the captions are only loose references to the protagonist's corporeal location. They are puns and plays with words that, in fact, direct the reader's understanding outside of the images on the page and the body represented within the panels. Like Feuchtenberger's 2001 publication, *Das Haus*, a collection of vertical comic strips for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Feuchtenberger uses the text-image relationship to construct poetic associations instead of descriptions. The heart becomes the town of Königshütte and a second nondescript organ, perhaps the stomach, a sunroom ("Sonnenstube"), after which the figure arrives in the female sex organs. Here, the uterus is identified as a water castle ("Wasserschloss") and the vagina, from which the protagonist emerges, an estuary or river mouth ("Flussmündung").

While the figure traverses these imaginary spaces, she describes a dream in captions that run along the bottom of each panel. In first person narration, the woman recounts the loneliness she felt finding herself in this strange place. Upon emerging from

the vagina, however, she observes that “...es scheint nicht ausgeschlossen, dass mal jemand vorbeikommt” [“...it doesn’t seem to impossible that someone might at some point swing by”]. Surfacing as she does from the vaginal opening, this last statement could be in reference to two things. The first, sex, requires a second individual to commit the act, thereby bringing the protagonist’s isolation to an end. This deed, however, does not concern the figure’s present. It suggests an event in the past, perhaps the protagonist’s conception, or the future. A second interpretation, birth, therefore seems more likely and is also in keeping with the leitmotif of motherhood throughout *Mutterkuchen*. While the irony and playfulness of this comic is profound, its black and white aesthetic and somber facial expressions also impart the sense of loneliness that characterizes the protagonist’s dream.

After a splash page featuring a female figure and a mer-child instructing her to jump (“Los! Spring endlich!”) comes *Mutterkuchen*’s longest graphic narrative, “Living Next Door to Alice.” Spanning twenty-seven pages, it takes up nearly half of the publication. The subtitle, “Dämons are a girl’s best friend,” yet another playful combination of English and German, observes how demons—and not diamonds—are a girl’s best friend, perhaps equating diamonds themselves, another important symbol of romantic love – like the roses of Feuchtenberger’s earlier graphic narrative – with the imprisonment that is associated with Hell. However, it also highlights the conflicted nature of capitalist desire in the context of the newly emerging advertising culture in East Germany.

“Living Next Door to Alice” explicitly draws on the work of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. However, dedicated to Alice Liddell in the same

caption as the above-mentioned subtitle, “Living Next Door to Alice” paints a very different picture of Carroll’s fantasy world. Feuchtenberger’s rendition of this classic children’s story is even more surreal and haunting than the original text, simplifying the narrative to a series of bizarre encounters in an abstracted space that bares no relationship to Carroll’s imagined world. Furthermore, “Living Next Door to Alice” references not only Carroll’s story about Alice but also the process of its making and the pedophilic controversy that surrounded Carroll’s infatuation with the young girl that inspired his story.<sup>279</sup>

The full-page title panel returns to the bridge iconography of “Strudel Petra,” which I examine later in this chapter. It fills in the gaps of the first story perhaps to illuminate the cause of the protagonist’s fall, which “Living Next Door to Alice” recasts as a suicide attempt. As in the story that inspired it, Alice encounters a white rabbit, but instead of obsessing about time, he mocks Alice for her existential contemplation before she plunges into the depths of the water below. She then awakens in a labyrinth, recalling imagery from “Marian La Luna und der Gottvater” and the exhibition space in which “Die Strudel Petra” was first presented, where she follows two upright-walking talking tortoises, a combination of Tweedledee and Tweedledum and the Mock Turtle, until she encounters a Humpty Dumpty figure sitting upon a high wall. Similar to the children’s nursery rhyme, Humpty Dumpty falls, and Alice continues on to find a tiny door revealing a garden on the other side of the wall. A diminutive, well-dressed gentleman appears (fig. 3.3), looking much like Lewis Carroll himself in the representation of his curls and bowtie (fig. 3.4), and offers Alicia a beverage to help her shrink.

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<sup>279</sup> Jenny Woolf, “Lewis Carroll’s Shifting Reputation,” *Smithsonian*, last modified April 2005, [www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/lewis-carrolls-shifting-reputation-9432378/?no-ist](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/lewis-carrolls-shifting-reputation-9432378/?no-ist); “Just Good Friends?,” *The Guardian*, October 29, 2011, [www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/29/gender.uk](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/29/gender.uk).



With tears streaming down her face in a panel that remarkably makes Alice look like she is performing fellatio, the protagonist finishes the bottle and vomits up its contents until she shrinks to the size of the doorframe. Finally in the garden on the other side, where the grass grows taller than her body, Alice meets another darker version of herself. The two escape the forest of grass to determine their respective identities, when they encounter an oversized sleeping king, also implied to be Lewis Carroll. They soon realize that they are not part of Alice’s dream, as the classic children’s story would have us believe, but Carroll’s, who the protagonist refers to by his real last name, Dodgson. The two versions of the protagonist embrace and begin to merge until they are one body – half light and half dark – hovering above the labyrinth in which Alice was originally trapped.

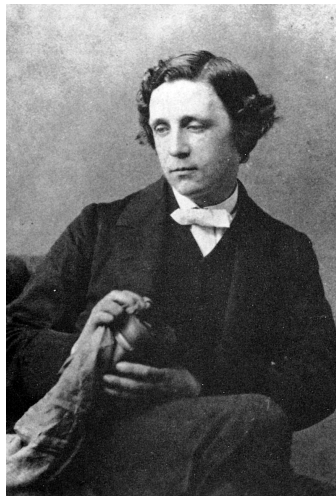


Fig. 3.3: Feuchtenberger, “Living next door to Alice,” in *Mutterkuchen* (Berlin: Jochen Enterprises, 1995), n.p.

Fig. 3.4: Lewis Carroll, photograph by Oscar G. Rejlander, 1863.

The seventh graphic narrative is unique in the collection. In oversaturated planes of painted color, “Erreger’s” eleven panels connect several of *Mutterkuchen*’s stories into one comic. Composed of images that recall previous graphic narratives and their

symbolism, phrasing and figures from “Rosen,” “Marian la Luna und der Gottvater” “Living Next Door to Alice,” and “Die Geburt der Helvetia,” Feuchtenberger depicts the love life of the comics’ protagonist, who appears in the final panel with her child, as populated by grotesque and unpleasant men.

In bright and contrasting colors, each man is enumerated with an accompanying rhyming descriptor that metaphorically encompasses his position in the protagonist’s life. Many of these panels – and even some of the men represented within them – recall Feuchtenberger’s other comics, weaving all of Feuchtenberger’s graphic narratives that feature a male character into one. The final image of the protagonist with her child, however, breaks the pattern, and with a crucial negation, the narrator sets these figures apart from the preceding ten men. Gazing out of the panel with bright green eyes, which contrast sharply with the red coloring of the figures and their background, the final panel reads “But we are totally moral” [“Aber wir sind völlig integer”], subsequently casting all former panels and people in an immoral light. Yet, while smiling to an unseen audience outside of the panel, the mother and child reveal vampiric teeth and thereby undermine the panel’s caption, once again reinforcing *Mutterkuchen*’s leitmotif of maternal (and moral) ambivalence.

The next graphic narrative, "Die Geburt der Helvetia," maintains the vibrant and contrasting colors of the previous comic but incorporates an unusual triangular stylization of the panel frames. The subject, the birth of the personification of Switzerland, is an unusual metaphorical exploration of Swiss nationality while also maintaining the overall themes of birth and motherhood consistent with the other stories within the collection.

The volume's final comic, "Nacht über Bärmi und Klett," returns to the black and white coloring and traditional format of the majority of Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives (fig. 3.5). This story, one of four in the series of Bärmi und Klett which I have already examined in Chapter One, features the spiral-haired protagonist with her infant child in a surreal dream world that exhibits stark expressionist qualities in its visual representation. The elongated horizontal panels that expand across the width of the page are largely absent of text, but the angular, disproportionate and stylized spaces and sharp perspectives haunt the reader, as the child's nightmarish experience manifests in the representational mode of the graphic narrative.

In a room filled with swimming, monstrous, and oversized fish sleeps a baby. The mother, who is busy assembling (or disassembling) a toy house, rushes into the bedroom where her infant has started crying. She comforts the baby, explaining that it was all only a bad dream ["Es war nur ein Traum. Alles wird gut"]. However, upon going to bed herself, the viewer witnesses the mother, now unclothed, also surrounded by the same monstrous fish, forcing the reader to question if the horror that awoke the baby was even a dream in the first place (fig. 3.6).



Fig. 3.5: Feuchtenberger, “Nacht über Bärmi und Klett,” in *Mutterkuchen* (Berlin: Jochen Enterprises, 1995), n.p.

Fig. 3.6: Feuchtenberger, “Nacht über Bärmi und Klett,” n.p.

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Feuchtenberger’s narrative techniques do not simply connect the events depicted between the panels, they also highlight the formal characteristics of her work that contribute to the intervention of her art and set her work apart from that of other comics artists. Drawing on different traditions in the construction of the comics page to develop innovative narrative strategies, Feuchtenberger’s art moves beyond typical comics conventions to produce an unusual reading experience that differs from that of serialized or popular comics. She thereby joins the ranks of other important women working in comics such as Linda Barry, Phoebe Gloeckner, Alison Bechdal and Marjane Satrapi. Moreover, with her work’s autobiographical undertones, including the artist’s focus on the relationship between mother and child, self-referential style and spiral-haired self-representation, Feuchtenberger would be an appropriate addition to Hillary Chute’s *Graphic Women* (2010), which examines Barry, Gloeckner, Bechdal and Satrapi’s autobiographical graphic narrative.

Furthermore, Feuchtenberger's comics also bare a stronger relationship to the work of feminists artists such as the conceptual self-portraiture of Cindy Sherman, the dark self-exposure and surrealism of Frida Kahlo, the feminist religious critique of Lilith Adler and the combination of text, image and commercial rhetoric of Barbara Kruger. Lastly, the varied representational modes of Feuchtenberger's comics engage and enter into political discourse. Adopting the visual, intellectual and narrative strategies of various genres and movements – from illuminated manuscripts to German Expressionism and the semiology of gender – Feuchtenberger's innovative formal techniques move beyond panel formation to produce radically new systems of representation and reading experience. Feuchtenberger's texts not only utilize the fragmented nature of the comics medium to express ambivalent, distanced and irreconcilable experiences, they also draw from theoretical, political and art historical traditions to develop a form of feminine graphic expression that inscribes femininity on a formal level.

In the following section, I investigate this development of Feuchtenberger's feminine graphic expression through four comics from *Mutterkuchen*. Each narrative illustrates important aspects of Feuchtenberger's aesthetic politics – the bodily manifestation of misogynist culture, the subversion of patriarchal master narratives and the deconstruction of society's underlying feminine and romantic myths. In "Die Strudel Petra," Feuchtenberger engages the politics of gender graphically. The artist marks the body with the manifested violence of feminine ideals, rendering the oppression of female subjectivity visible. The protagonist's sexuality is presented as a block of ice encasing her body; her flaming heart is extinguished in a metaphorical ritual sacrifice, as her virgin body is sawed into pieces. "Marian La Luna und der Gottvater" explores the cosmos

within the vagina of Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired *Kunstfigur*, revealing the prehistory of masculine oppression through a rewriting of the Fall of Man. Lastly, in "Rosen" and "No Roses," Feuchtenberger engages the semiology of gender to deconstruct traditional dichotomies, rendering Home a masculine space that confines women and representing Nature as wild and feminine.

### **"Die Strudel Petra" and Feuchtenberger's Spiral-haired Protagonist**

The introductory story to *Mutterkuchen*, "Die Strudel Petra," establishes the autobiographical nature of Feuchtenberger's *Kunstfigur* work early on. Not only does it feature the artist's spiral-haired self, but Feuchtenberger has also acknowledged that "Die Strudel Petra" as an artistic project to help her come to terms with her troubled relationship with her mother that situates her work within the tradition of Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter*.<sup>280</sup> We can thereby begin to see the way in which Feuchtenberger engages her own biography throughout her graphic art through the strategies and themes she integrates into this first graphic narrative. However, abstracted through the language of advertising and the anonymity of its protagonists, the story of "Die Strudel Petra" is presented allegorically and thus speaks to a larger audience, losing many of its autobiographical connotations. Feuchtenberger's protagonist therefore functions simultaneously as a figure of self-representation as well as a stand-in for a plurality of women in her criticism of societal expectations. Consequently, the series of metaphorical anecdotes operates as both a personal endeavor to overcome the trauma of her upbringing as well as an overarching critique of contemporary gender politics.

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<sup>280</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014 and June 2016.

Positioning *Mutterkuchen*'s first graphic narrative in the context of *Der Struwwelpeter* is an important move. The classic children's story features heavy-handed patriarchal morality that stands in ironic juxtaposition to Feuchtenberger's rendition, which features Feuchtenberger's young – and importantly female – spiral-haired protagonist, while also informing its reading. *Struwwelpeter*, or "Slovenly Peter" (fig. 3.7) as it is translated, immediately summons a very different visual image than *Strudel Petra*, or "Whirl/Vortex Petra," a name that references the swirled hairstyle atop the protagonist's head as well as the water, birth and thumbprint imagery throughout the volume. Instead of immediately presenting the figure in a moralistic and pejorative tone, as the Hoffmann's text does, Feuchtenberger's adaptation ambivalently situates her protagonist in neither a positive nor negative light, only perhaps expressing an inability to control or contain her character due to her name's allusions to whirlpools and maelstrom.

Furthermore, Feuchtenberger adopts neither the rhyming structure nor the narrative form of Hoffmann's original, modernizing the conventions of 19<sup>th</sup> century moralism through the rhetoric of advertising. While *Der Struwwelpeter* presents short rhyming stories on the antics of misbehaving children and the sometimes-horrific consequences of their actions, such as cutting off a child's thumbs to stop thumb-sucking, "Die Strudel Petra" poses ironic questions that illustrate the ridiculous nature of the social, familial and cultural expectations imposed on young women. Moreover, Hoffmann's intentions were pedagogical in his desire to instruct problem children to behave,<sup>281</sup> while

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<sup>281</sup> While Hoffmann was an educated psychiatrist and teacher, it remains unclear as to how emblematic *Struwwelpeter* was in terms of childrearing practices of the time versus to what extent the stories were based on the author's real life experience and own concerns in parenting his child. However, the immense popularity of the volume speaks to its cultural clout and the championing of a certain type of patriarchal moralism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For more information see, Barbara Smith Chalou's *Struwwelpeter: Humor Or Horror?: 160 Years Later* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).



Feuchtenberger's adoption of the iconography of *Struwwelpeter* turns its attention to the problem *parents*, who, the narrative proposes, are imposing impossible expectations on young women.

Yet despite these obvious differences in the two stories, situating Strudel Petra within the cultural, historical and narrative legacies of *Der Struwwelpeter* also sends important messages to the readers of Feuchtenberger's graphic narrative that point to its position in the history of comic art and the context of historical social critique and patriarchal forms of morality.

Like *Struwwelpeter*, Feuchtenberger's Strudel Petra functions as an archetype. However, unlike Hoffmann's original, she is not a symbolic representation of naughty children. Instead, the Strudel Petra character embodies a strong-willed and independent feminine subjectivity. Furthermore, through Feuchtenberger's use of the rhetoric of commercial advertising, the graphic narrative is equally powerful in imparting a sense of the contemporary moment through its critique of consumer capitalism (which was the inspiration for the advertising language populating the panels) as much as it is a condemnation of society's expectations on young women and the oppression of feminine subjectivities in the immediate post-unification moment.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2016.



Fig. 3.7: Heinrich Hoffmann, “Der Struwelpeter,” 1858.

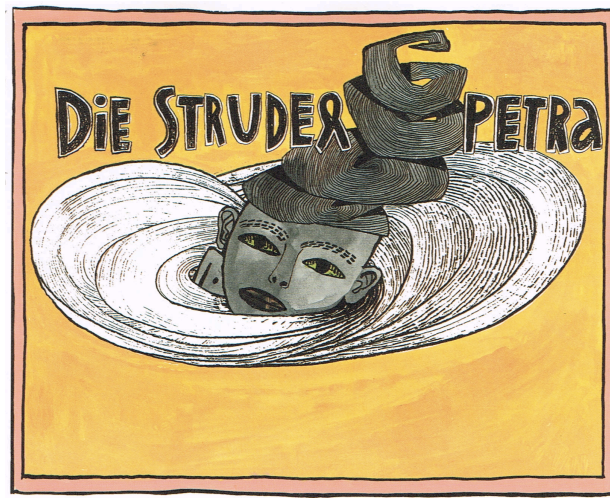


Fig. 3.8: Feuchtenberger, “Die Strudel Petra,” n.p.

The introductory panel of “Die Strudel Petra” situates the spiral-haired figure within one of Feuchtenberger’s many scenes of birth (fig. 3.8). Strudel Petra stares – blank-eyed – straight-ahead out to the viewer from within a constricting orifice that is either sucking her in or forcing her out. The ambiguity of this process offers two readings of the figure’s predicament. The artist’s preoccupation with motherhood and female corporality lends well to a reading of the abstracted constricting mass as female genitalia, and its rejection of this story’s protagonist as the character’s birth. Petra’s right shoulder juts out of the panel’s flattened and abstracted vulva, pushing against the rings of labia, while the left side of her torso is still submerged, rendering the moment of this representation tension-filled and on the verge of change.

At the same time, however, Strudel Petra’s introductory panel also produces the sense that the protagonist is being pulled into the female sex organ as much as she is being pushed out. When interpreting the panel right to left, a reading supported and directed by the figure’s tilted head, which falls along the panel’s diagonal, the outcome is

the opposite of reading the panel traditionally. With the curve of Strudel Petra's chin pushing against the thinnest wall of the vulva and her ear hovering precariously above the darkest portion of the spiraling mass, the protagonist appears to be in the process of being sucked in rather than pushed out. From this perspective, the abstracted vulva, the texture of which is reminiscent of a subdivided thumbprint, could also be a metaphor for individuality. Here, the vulva refers to the subjectivity of the protagonist's mother, and the process of reverse-birth becomes the subversion of the daughter's subjectivity to that of the mother's, a reading that foreshadows the panels to come. The ambivalent expression on Strudel Petra's face reinforces the contradiction supplied by the double reading of the title panel's action. Affording the viewer no clues as to whether the figure is being drawn into or forced out of the abstracted genitalia, Strudel Petra's facial expression also implies the figure's equivocal opinion of her situation. The panel, therefore, expresses both movements simultaneously, imparting a sense of ambivalence that is reflected throughout the rest of the story.

Located directly below the title panel, "Die Strudel Petra's" first set of panels (fig. 3.9) reiterates this indecisiveness. Here, mother and daughter stand next to each other in two panels, simultaneously engaging the other while also performing in their own separate spaces. There is an implied connection between the figures through their shared background space; however, while the two figures roughly face each other within their relative peach-colored planes of color, there is a disconnect in the inward direction of their mutual gazes. Petra glances downward as she stares forward out of the panel in the direction of the viewer; her mother, on the other hand, scolds her daughter facing away from the viewer and towards the back of the panel. Their juxtaposition produces a

somewhat disjointed spatiality that necessitates the intellectual stacking of the panels in order to make sense of the women's interaction. Moreover, the brushstrokes visible in the background, while uniting the figures in color, signal separate spaces in the texture and direction of the painted strokes. The absence of Petra's shadow, which is broken off by the border of the first panel but does not penetrate into the panel occupied by her mother, further distinguishes the spaces of the two figures, as the light casting the shadows implies two distinct spaces lit by contradictory light sources. The simultaneous occupancy of the same but different spaces reiterates the contradictions of the title panel, while also signaling a symbolic shift between the perspectives of the mother and daughter.

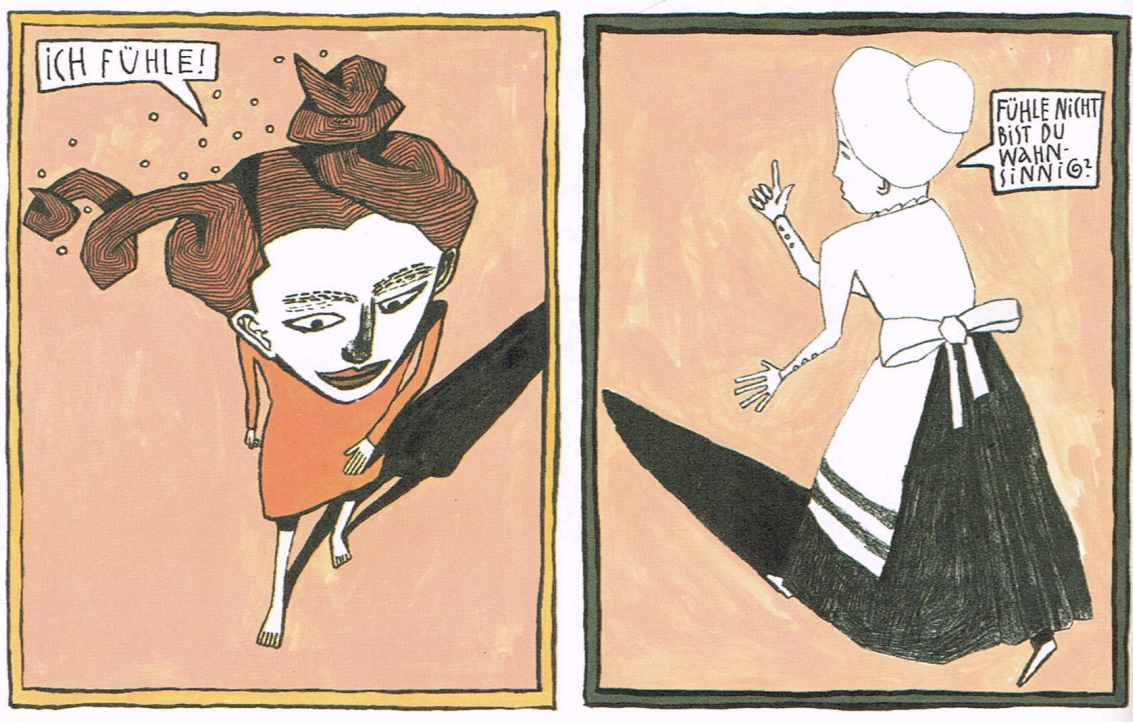


Fig. 3.9: Feuchtenberger, "Die Strudel Petra," n.p.

From above, we look down onto Petra, who gently touches her genital area through her dress while stating to the reader, and possibly her mother, "Ich fühle!" ["I feel!"] "Fühlen" or "to feel" in this context underscores both a physical ability to touch

oneself and the sensation of feeling touch itself, while also implying masturbation and an ability to feel emotion. In the following panel, which unlike every other panel in the story is located directly next to the first and in this way sets the tone of the graphic narrative, offers the perspective of the mother. With her finger raised, she attempts to verbally negate all aspects of feeling, physical and otherwise: “Fühle nicht. Bist du wahnsinnig?” [“Don’t feel. Are you crazy?”] Here, the mother commands her daughter not to touch herself, but she is also instructing her not to feel in general. While the first imperative is not uncommon among mothers, the ridiculousness of the implication that accompanies the second undermines the mother’s admonishment altogether. However, to satisfactorily understand these first two panels, the reader must continue reading in order to retroactively comprehend the substance of this initial interaction between mother and daughter. The artist’s preoccupation with the naked female body, feminine subjectivity and female masturbation in the subsequent panels lend insight into this first interaction.

Ultimately, for Strudel Petra, the act of touching oneself for pleasure is as natural as feeling, and being told not to express her sexuality is as stifling as a directive not to have emotions. Furthermore, the second sentence of the mother’s reprimand reiterates social conventions on femininity. Linking madness with sexuality calls to attention a long tradition of suppressing female sexual urges that has its roots in the medieval period, the history of hysteria and the pathologizing of feminine sexuality. In her interrogation of her daughter’s sanity, the mother becomes a symbol for society as a whole, and her oppression of her daughter’s sexuality is rendered a public issue.

The remaining twenty-two panels of “Die Strudel Petra,” all of which maintain the same half-page format of the title panel, are constructed in a similar manner. Each

feature the figure of Strudel Petra, sometimes accompanied by her mother, at the center of the panel. She either stares blankly at the viewer or off to the side, but she never engages the mother figure that accompanies her. The mother, in turn, remains closed off to the viewer, either presented from behind or from the side, but always in black and white wearing relatively bourgeois attire. The characters are placed within rectangular panels with either no background or planes of color filling up the spaces behind and around the figures. This visual strategy flattens the figures and objects within the panel even more than the unrealistic representation of the bodies. Shadowing exists but is sparse, and little to no effort is made to construct the impression that Feuchtenberger's figures exist in real space. These techniques draw the characters further into fantasy and away from real world representation, which lends itself well to a metaphorical and, as I shall later argue, mythological interpretation of the panels.

The first interaction between mother and daughter in the narrative's initial two panels signals the oppositional and contradictory tone with which the remaining panels should be read. While every other pairing is accompanied by non-diegetic captions above the figures, the first exchange occurs via speech balloons and takes place in a conversation between mother and daughter. This frames the authoritative speech that hovers above the figures in all subsequent panels as simultaneously private interactions between mother and daughter as well as metaphorical affirmations of society's understanding of femininity.

The narrative unfolds through aphoristic observations that populate the upper quarter of the picture planes. The statements, usually spanning the width of the static panels, present observations on problem daughters followed by a second panel offering a



“solution.” The pairing adopts the language of consumerism and is reminiscent of commercial advertising strategies, where a problem that is not really a problem is solved with a gimmick-like solution. Feuchtenberger uses common expressions or idioms and presents them literally within the panel’s picture to undermine their figurative meanings, thereby constructing a critique of the oppression of female subjectivity. For example, Strudel Petra’s “flaming heart” is rendered literal with her chest cavity exposed as she lights a cigarette on the fire consuming her most vital organ, only to have her flame extinguished as she is dunked into a bath of water as a “Rauchopfer” in the following panel (fig. 3.10). Meaning “incense,” “Rauchopfer” can also be literally translated as “smoke victim” or “sacrifice.” It thereby references both the negative health outcomes of the figure smoking a cigarette in the initial panel as well as the extinguishing of feminine passion for the greater good, a primitive sacrifice for modern society.

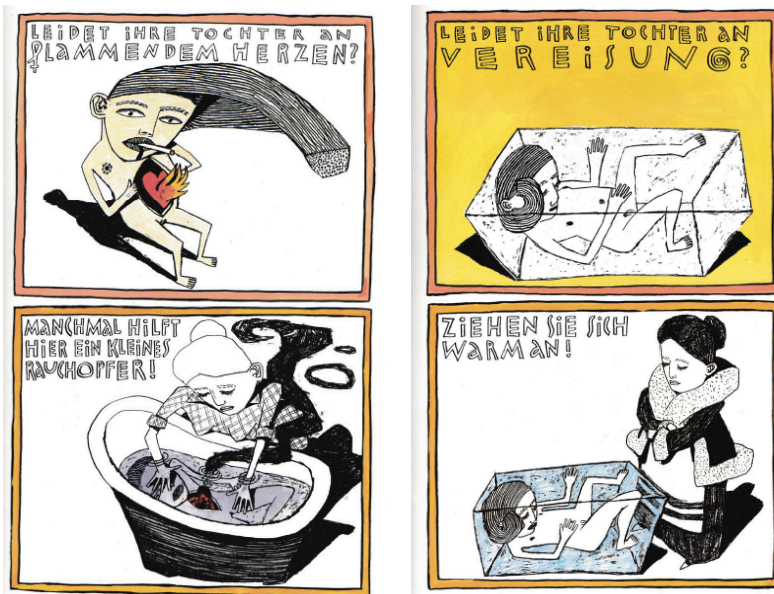


Fig. 3.10: Feuchtenberger, “Die Strudel Petra,” n.p.

Fig. 3.11: Feuchtenberger, “Die Strudel Petra,” n.p.

A later set of images exhibits a similar literalization of figurative meaning. The first panel reads “Leidet Ihre Tochter an Vereisung?” [“Does your daughter suffer from



glaciation?"]], in which a naked female body is trapped in a block of ice (fig. 3.11). The implication of “Vereisung” here is twofold. First, it is the geological term “glaciation,” hence the block of ice. However, that is not the meaning implied by this panel. Instead, it is referencing another type of iciness, either of a cold disposition or a frigid personality, with the latter also suggesting sexual prudishness. Instead of engaging the naked female figure or defrosting the block of ice within which she is trapped, the second panel’s solution proposes ignoring the problem with: “Ziehen Sie sich warm an!” [“Put on something warm!”] Once again, the figurative implications of these two panels, that the daughter has an icy personality, are dealt with literally, and the idiom becomes manifest in the representation and action of the characters presented.



Fig. 3.12: Feuchtenberger, “Die Strudel Petra,” n.p.

The most obvious literalization of idioms occurs in the set of panels following the ice-block images. The spiral-haired protagonist stands alone looking over the side of a bridge, recalling a common form of suicide (fig. 3.12). Above her reads: “Leidet Ihre Tochter an Fellwegschwimmen?” The idiom “seine Felle wegschwimmen sehen” [“to

watch your pelts swim away”] means to give up hope or to expect a negative outcome. In the image, however, the figure watches as her “Felle” (“pelts”) – perhaps her dress, which is absent in the following image – literally swim away.

The second panel proposes as its solution the following: “Brechen Sie allen Brücken ab!” Again a common idiom, “alle Brücken hinter sich abbrechen” means to radically change ones life or to break all ties. However, the literal translation of “alle Brücken hinter sich abbrechen” is to “tear down all bridges behind oneself.” The spiral-haired figure, now naked, appears as if she were thrown over (or jumped off) the bridge as her mother watches ominously from above. Her fall, which we witness from the opposite vantage point as we did while observing her watching her hopes wash away, appears not to land her in the river, as implied by the first image, but out of the picture plane altogether and into the space of the viewer. Furthermore, the bridge itself has changed dramatically, now green and quadrilateral as opposed to the yellow and curved bridge of the early panel, creating a space that is hard to map onto reality and therefore should be read entirely metaphorically. While significance of these two panels is complex, the criticism is clear: when one has a pessimistic daughter, it is the mother’s responsibility – a stand in for society itself – to burn all her bridges.

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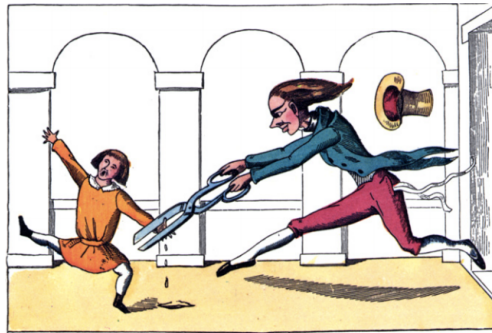


Fig. 3.13: Feuchtenberger, “Die Strudel Petra,” *Mutterkuchen*, 1995, n.p.

Fig. 3.14: Hoffmann, “Die Geschichte vom Daumenlutscher” in *Der Struwwelpeter*, 1845.

I read this process by which Feuchtenberger renders figurative idioms literal as an important way in which she develops a feminist form of graphic expression, a strategy that illustrates how concepts, words and ideas mark the female body to rob women of their subjectivity. Emerging first in the language of “Die Strudel Petra,” which addresses the protagonist in the third person and positions qualities of her personality as problems, the same sentiment is reflected in the accompanying images. In each set of panels, Feuchtenberger’s spiral-haired protagonist is unable to be her authentic self, as her oppressive mother subjugates her daughter’s individuality, both literally and figuratively. While the mother herself is humorless, cruel and sadistic, she makes a mockery of her daughter’s humorlessness; her father cuts off his daughter’s thumbs when she masturbates (fig. 3.13), an overt reference to *Struwwelpeter* (fig. 3.14); and the protagonist’s self-confidence is presented as “Grössenwahn” (“delusions of grandeur”). Like *Der Struwwelpeter* that came before it, Feuchtenberger’s “Die Strudel Petra” suggests a “universal attitude toward child rearing... that suggests children should

practice blind authority toward adults or suffer the consequences,” but instead of reinforcing this sentiment, Feuchtenberger’s text critiques and undermines it.<sup>283</sup>

While based on Feuchtenberger’s relationship with her own mother, the artist’s personal experience is abstracted through the simplicity of the imagery, lack of realism and aphoristic language, resulting in only traces of autobiography remaining. The situations depicted take on metaphorical rather than real-world meaning, representing general instead of individual female experience. Feuchtenberger thereby critiques the oppression of feminine subjectivity not just in her own family, but also in society at large.

In *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, Paul Betts quotes Lenin’s famous statement that “under communism nothing is private,” arguing that “the relative absence of any public sphere of open debate and genuine civil society ... rendered the private sphere so important and politically potent.”<sup>284</sup> As a child who grew up in East German, Feuchtenberger attests to her continued inability to differentiate between the private from the political spheres, and in terms of her artistic production, the artist’s personal *is* political.<sup>285</sup> The issues presented in Feuchtenberger’s “Die Strudel Petra” therefore become the larger problems of female individuality, and the graphic narrative’s “solutions” illustrate the artist’s belief that society does not allow women to feel, fear or be passionate in the same way as men. Strudel Petra is asked to control her feelings and/or void herself of feelings. Similar to *Der Struwwelpeter*, the reactions to the protagonist’s ailments, which do not seem overly problematic or atypical, are unjustifiably cruel. However, Feuchtenberger turns Hoffmann’s intention on its head.

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<sup>283</sup> Smith Chalou, *Struwwelpeter*, 2.

<sup>284</sup> Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>285</sup> Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2016.

Instead of using the tropes of *Struwwelpeter* to teach problem children to behave, she engages the classic children's book to highlight the systematic and systemic oppression perpetrated by adults. Furthermore, dictated as they are by the figure of her mother, I read this graphic narrative as exemplifying how the established and systematic oppression of women is also committed and perpetuated *by* women.

Importantly, "Strudel Petra" began as a video project.<sup>286</sup> Exhibited in Berlin in the early 1990s, "Strudel Petra" was a collaborative installation that featured the panels presented in *Mutterkuchen* accompanied by voiceover and music and situated in front of a labyrinth constructed by the artist.<sup>287</sup> Akin to television commercials, "Die Strudel Petra" as a video project partook even more in the rhetoric of advertising that we see within the panels of her comic version, which in hindsight now also functions as both movie stills and a storyboard simultaneously. After 1989, Feuchtenberger was shocked by the dramatic emergence of commercial advertising and produced "Die Strudel Petra" partially in response to the changes occurring in the East German cultural landscape.<sup>288</sup> "Die Strudel Petra" thereby also functions as a critique of the emergence of rampant consumer capitalism in GDR.

### **"Marian La Luna und der Gottvater" and the Fall of Woman**

The themes of *Mutterkuchen*'s cover art re-emerge in this untitled graphic narrative, which I refer to as "Marian La Luna und der Gottvater" after its principle characters. Here, Feuchtenberger makes her most visible intervention in patriarchal traditions of narration to cultivate a feminine aesthetics in storytelling. The break with the

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

conventional linear paneling style of the comics medium, recalling older traditions in the visual arts, and the *mise en abyme* sequence immediately mark the narrative as significant, as does the repetition of the visual strategies on *Mutterkuchen's* cover. In a series of twelve circular panels, which resemble the medallions of 13<sup>th</sup> century illuminated manuscripts or the format of tondos, Renaissance circular paintings, the untitled comic recounts a revisionist parable of the Fall of Man that, in fact, portrays the Fall of Woman. Here, Feuchtenberger metaphorically illustrates the archetypal events of female oppression, rewriting the story of original sin as a masculine offense.



Fig. 3.15: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, in *Mutterkuchen* (Berlin: Jochen Enterprises, 1995), n.p.

Fig. 3.16: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

The first medallion depicts Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired protagonist, who is typically represented naked, wearing a long dress and headpiece that drapes down to her knees (fig. 13.5). The costume resembles a nun's habit, and the halo hovering above the figure's covered head reinforces that association. However, the imagery also recalls the iconography and conventions of representing Mary, as her name would also have us believe. Seated and crying, the figure resembles a *pieta*. A puddle of tears has formed

around her feet, implying that she has been in despair for quite some time. However, instead of Jesus lying across her lap, the woman presents a dead fish to the viewer, a symbolic representation for Christ. The fish skeleton, a Biblical allusion, refers both to the fish as the symbol for followers of the Christian faith as well as to Jesus' command to his disciples: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."<sup>289</sup>

The narrative, symbolism and typically religious format of both the medallion and the tondo immediately situate Feuchtenberger's second graphic narrative within a Biblical context. However, despite the overt religious criticisms within the text, Feuchtenberger's adoption of Biblical themes functions to do more than simply lambaste Christianity. Feuchtenberger also uses the symbolism as a strategy to situate her story within typically masculine forms of narration. As a prototypical paternal narrative, the Bible is arguably the invention of the paternal narrative and countless masculine narrative tropes have emerged from within its pages. Like Feuchtenberger's feminist retelling of the Struwwelpeter story in "Die Strudel Petra," here, too, the artist rewrites the story of the original sin from the perspective of the opposite gender, Eve.

Immediately, within that first medallion, Feuchtenberger's graphic narrative undermines the conventions of the artistic genre of religious painting, situating her story in direct opposition to the story of Mary. With the proclamation "Ich sass nicht immer so!" ["I didn't always sit like this!"], which simultaneously refers to her seated position as well as, more colloquially, doing time in jail, she stands up, casting the dead fish aside, and lifts up her dress to reveal her genitalia (fig. 3.16). Her tears have dried as the figure spreads open her labia revealing the cosmos in between her legs. She calls out "Look!" in English as the panel zooms in on her vulva (fig 3.17). Here, Feuchtenberger collapses the

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<sup>289</sup> Matthew 4:19



form and content of her graphic narrative as she merges the female body with the writing process, producing a *mise en abyme* within the image. As we continue to zoom in on the protagonist’s genitalia, the subject of the panel – her vulva – combines with the now diegetic lettering of the Feuchtenberger’s command, and the figure’s vaginal opening becomes one of the Os in “Look!”



Fig. 3.17: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

Fig. 3.18: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

Feuchtenberger takes this one step further, and in a third tondo featuring the spiral-haired figure’s vulva, the artist continues to unite the female body with the aesthetic strategies of her storytelling, demonstrating a close connection between form and content. Here, the protagonist’s labia come to frame Feuchtenberger’s tondo, marrying the subject matter of the panel with the formal qualities of the comics medium and rendering all previous and successive circular panels vaginal (fig. 3.18). With the woman’s hands still visible at the edge of her vagina, the reader concludes that the rest of the story takes place within her body and all panel walls to follow are actually the spiral-haired figure’s labia.

This is not the first time Feuchtenberger uses the theme of the vaginal cosmos in her work. In addition to its appearance on the cover of *Mutterkuchen*, Feuchtenberger

also produced an image for the cover of the 1996 winter issue of *On the Issues*, a progressive, feminist quarterly print publication from 1983 to 1999 (fig. 3.19). However, instead of presenting the viewer with a window into the universe between her legs, the spiral-haired protagonist on the cover of this progressive women's magazine is sewing her labia shut, perhaps in response to the question posed in bold lettering to her left: "What is justice for a rape victim?" The figure presented here, much like Marian La Luna in *Mutterkuchen*'s second graphic narrative, is also responding to a masculine transgression but with a distinct alteration in the visual tone. Instead of presenting a story within her own body, the spiral-haired protagonist on the cover of the magazine weeps as she sews her vaginal opening shut, closing the cosmos within her body off from the rest of the world. With jagged edges where her labia should be, the image implies that act of rape tore open a gaping hole that she is then forced to mend herself. While Feuchtenberger's parable in *Mutterkuchen* is not one of rape, the parallel does draw very violent comparisons between the consequences of female oppression by masculine forces and foreshadows the panels to come, in which the spiral-haired protagonist suffers a brutal dismemberment.

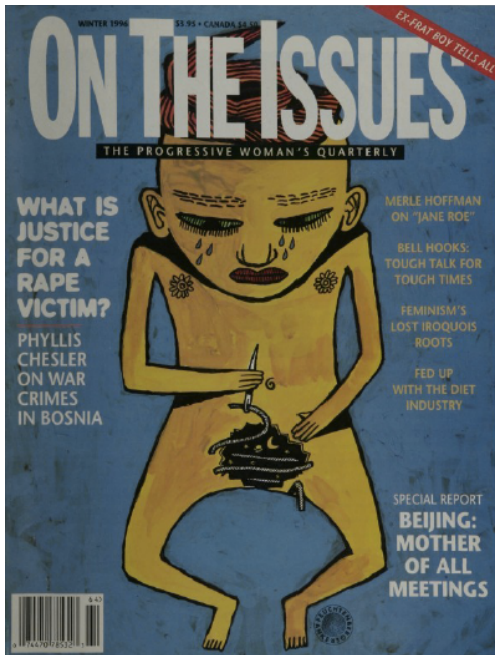


Fig. 3.19: Feuchtenberger, untitled, in *On the Issues* 5.1 (Winter 1996), cover.

As we look deeper into Marian La Luna’s vaginal cosmos, we see an earlier version of the protagonist. She stands on a planet only slightly larger than her shoulder width, leaning forward and staring into space. At this point in her story, her spiraled hair is more than simply a hairstyle, as it features a snake’s head at its end—yet another Biblical reference that unites Eve with the serpent corporeally. The figure is introduced as Marian La Luna, “Autorin ihrer Selbst” [“Author of herself”], explicitly themetizing female agency in a story that is traditionally condemning human will.



Fig. 3.20: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

Fig. 3.21: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

The comic continues by introducing a male figure (fig. 3.20). His hair radiates from his head like sunbeams, positioning him as the inverse of Marian La Luna. Looking down onto Marian below, the male god-like figure, who stands on a balcony with an angel peering over his shoulder, asks “Will sie von niemandem bessen sein? Gehört ihr die Nacht allein?” [“Does she want to be possessed by no one?”] Marian, who crouches next to a monkey breastfeeding a human child, does not notice the man observing her. Upon encountering him in the following panel, he is hiding a dagger behind his back. Marian appears ignorant of his wicked intentions, stating “Da kommt Sonne in mein Megaherz” [“Here comes the sun into my mega-heart”]. The man replies, “Lass uns das Wild beim Namen nennen, dann gehört es uns!” [“Let us name the wild things – for then they will belong to us!”], which alludes to God giving the creatures of the Garden of Eden to Adam to name, referenced again in the pair of graphic narratives “Rosen” and “No Roses,” and reiterates the importance of ownership for this figure who will soon be identified as God the Father.

Immediately, the angel begins to dress Marian. Confused, she questions “Ist’s Leben? Liebe?” [“Is this life? Love?”] Without acknowledging her inquiry and while her eyes are covered, the man takes his knife to the throat of the snake coiled around her head and declares “Deinen Garten bring’ ich in Ordnung, Schlange!” (fig. 3.21) [“I’m straightening up your garden, snake!”] In the next panel, Marian stands alone again, clothed in the long dress in which she is first introduced at the beginning of the comic. The snake’s head on top of her head has been severed, leaving only the coil, which the reader now recognizes as the spiraled hairstyle of Feuchtenberger’s *Kunstfigur*, and blood on her dress. The angel offers Marian a lily, a symbol of virginity and purity, a common attribute of the Madonna and the flower of the Assumption, and a comforting embrace, but she can only stare down onto her soiled garment in despair declaring that “Gottavater hat mich angeschissen!” [“God the Father screwed me!”] In the final panel, we see Marian again, still in the long dress but with straightened hair (fig. 3.22). She wanders a labyrinth along with an upright-walking monkey and its baby. With her eyes cast downward, Marian observes “Sieht aus, als wäre dieser Irrgarten des Herrn eine Sackgasse!” [Looks as if this labyrinth of men is a cul-de-sac!”]



Fig. 3.22: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

The Biblical parallels in this graphic narrative are not subtle. The protagonist's name, Marian, is clearly a reference to Mary. The snake, the angel, the male figure identified as God the Father and the references to a garden reinforce a Biblical interpretation of Feuchtenberger's comic. However, it also retains connections to other mythological texts, as the snakehead could also be referencing the myth of Medusa. Whatever the particulars of Feuchtenberger's symbolism, by inverting the events of the story of the Garden of Eden, a critique of the patriarchal foundation of Christianity emerges. Instead of the Garden being a place inhabited by both man and woman, this "Irrgarten" ("Labyrinth"), which translates directly to "wander-garden" as well as "garden of madness," is a maze in which Marian is trapped. Importantly, in Feuchtenberger's recount of the Fall of Woman, it is not the snake that entices Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The snake, which is a symbol for both knowledge and sexual desire, is her companion, and Marian La Luna walks naked and free with the symbol of her carnal impulses atop her head, represented as an extension of Marian's innate character. Therefore, in order to take possession of Marian, God the Father needed to literally detach Marian from her sexuality and cover her naked body.

A metaphor for the subversion of feminine sensibilities to masculine priorities, Feuchtenberger's story warns that the persistence of male dominance ultimately leads into a deadend, a "Sackgasse." Furthermore, it suggests that feminine knowledge is derived from female sexuality. Robbing women of their sexuality therefore traps them in a labyrinth of masculine devise in which humanity is unable to progress and in which evolution, implied by the upright-walking monkey, stagnates.

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The allusion to the illuminated manuscript is striking, as the parallels between the relationship between text and image in comics and illuminated manuscripts make for interesting comparisons; however, it also speaks to Feuchtenberger's formal training in the arts and marks yet another way in which the artist integrates innovative narrative strategies. Instead of functioning like conventional comics, integrating an understanding of the relationship between word and text found within illuminated manuscripts adds a different dimension to the reading and analysis of the graphic narrative.

Looking to the 13<sup>th</sup> century *Bible moralisée* in Vienna, for example, an illuminated manuscript that features the same circular paneling or medallions as Feuchtenberger's untitled graphic narrative, we see the potentials of integrating this art historical strategy into comprehension. It also takes the figure of Mary as its subject, offering a moralizing tale in which the first medallion relates an episode of the Bible, while the second offers an accompanying allegorical interpretation with text.<sup>290</sup> The medallions do not operate in sequence in a comics sense and the space between them is not intended to be an imaginative space where the reader knits the story together, as is the case with closure in conventional comics. Instead, similar to illuminated manuscripts, Feuchtenberger's medallions provide vignettes into moments of the action, which are not situated within any realistic understanding of time and space. Like the *Bible moralisée*, Feuchtenberger adopts an allegorical – and even moralizing – interpretation of the traditional story of the Fall of Man. However, instead of interpreting it in the conventional manner, she produces a graphic narrative that undermines traditional

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<sup>290</sup> Jesse Hurlbut, "Comics Theory for the Ages: Text and Image Relations in Medieval Manuscripts" (presentation, International Comic Arts Forum, Columbia, SC, April 16, 2016).

readings of the Bible's most recognizable tale to make a statement about the role of religion in the oppression of women.



Fig. 3.23: Lilith Adler, *Foundation*, 1996.



Fig. 3.24: Adler, *Mitzvah*, 1996.

Feuchtenberger's feminist critique of the Judeo-Christian religion is not new, nor is her integration of text and image to impart it. Artist Lilith Adler was working towards similar aesthetic goals in the 1990s before her death in December 2000. A Jewish woman born in 1961 in Brookline, MA, Adler was of the same generation as Feuchtenberger and also used her art to explore the relationship between men, women, religion and oppression. In her 1996 piece *Foundation* (fig. 3.23), Adler draws attention to the place of the church in training individuals and, specifically in this image, young women how to think. Adler writes:

Religious training begins young. Theoretically this is to give a firm grounding in ethics, which should be a child's foundation for every decision he or she makes for the rest of his or her life. You might also say that religious training starts before a person has enough experience to be able to reason.

This is important, because religious beliefs are meant to replace reason. That's alright, nothing wrong with faith. You just hope the people who tell you what's right and what's wrong are not teaching you values that are



against your best interest. Because they got you young. And you will never get their voices out of your head.<sup>291</sup>

More contentious, however, is *Mitzvah* (fig. 3.24), Adler's painting of a morning blessing in the Jewish Traditional Prayer Book that reads: "Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has not created me a woman." With these words inscribed below the image of a young devoted worshipper, as if a caption within a comics panel, Adler launches her most powerful criticism at religion: "The religious values inform the social values, and to women, the religious and social values are just insulting."<sup>292</sup> The potent combination of text and image in both Adler and Feuchtenberger's work adds to the weight of their religious criticism. Underscoring the importance of language in the Judeo-Christian faith, both Adler and Feuchtenberger lend credibility and clarity to their feminist attacks on religion by integrating the very thing upon which it is founded, the written word.

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There is a second biblical allusion that emerges through further analysis of Feuchtenberger's Fall of Woman narrative. While many of the protagonist's characteristics suggest her affiliation with Mary as well as Eve, there is also an argument to be made that she instead represents Lilith or some combination of all three women. With the figure's serpentine hair, which recalls a long tradition of representing Lilith as half-snake, and sexual self-confidence, Feuchtenberger's spiral-haired protagonist exhibits a number of qualities that align her with Adam's first wife.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> "Lilith Adler," *Art History Archive*, [www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/contemporary/LilithAdler-ArtistsStatements.html](http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/contemporary/LilithAdler-ArtistsStatements.html).

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> See Hugo van der Goes's *Fall of Adam and Eve* (c. 1470), Michaelangelo's *The Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden* (1509-10), Raffaello Sanzio's *Adam and Eve* (1509-1) and Bosch's *Paradise* (c.

Consistent with this representation, Lilith is often associated with the snake that tempted Eve, and in some references is even thought to be the serpent itself. Her long flowing hair, another convention in depictions of Lilith, functions to both illustrate her potent and inviting sexuality as well as to perhaps symbolize male castration.<sup>294</sup> Also made of the earth at the same time of Adam's creation, according to Rebecca Lesses's entry in the *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Lilith considered herself Adam's equal. However, the two soon quarreled over who would be on top during sexual intercourse.<sup>295</sup> Refusing to yield to Adam's command, Lilith fled the Garden of Eden.<sup>296</sup>

Until the women's movement in the 1960's, the figure of Lilith was associated with kidnapping and murdering of children and characterized as a seductress of men. However, in 1972, the first Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow wrote a midrash, or non-halakhic literary interpretation, that elevated Lilith to a feminist role model.<sup>297</sup> "The Coming of Lilith" considers the role of the two wives of Adam within the context of each other, the Garden of Eden and the established patriarchy within the Judeo-Christian religion.

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1510).

<sup>294</sup> See Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1866–68) and John Collier's *Lilith* (1892); Amy Scerba, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting 'Lady Lilith,'" *Changing Literary Representations of Lilith and the Evolution of a Mythical Heroine*, last modified April 5, 1999, [feminism.eserver.org/theory/papers/lilith/ladylilEserver.org](http://feminism.eserver.org/theory/papers/lilith/ladylilEserver.org).

<sup>295</sup> Rebecca Lesses, "Lilith." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, last modified March 20, 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. [jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Lilith](http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Lilith).

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

Lilith, the outcast rebel, and Eve, dutiful but curious, encounter each other and form a sisterly bond that exposes the oppressive paternal agenda behind God and Man, thereby advancing an imagined transformation of the Garden of Eden.<sup>298</sup>

One day, after many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, Eve, wandering around the edge of the garden, noticed a young apple tree she and Adam had planted, and saw that one of its branches stretched over the garden wall. Spontaneously, she tried to climb it, and struggling to the top, swung herself over the wall.

She did not wander long on the other side before she met the one she had come to find, for Lilith was waiting. At first sight of her, Eve remembered the tales of Adam and was frightened, but Lilith understood and greeted her kindly. “Who are you?” they asked each other, “What is your story?” And they sat and spoke together of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of sisterhood grew between them.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, Adam was puzzled by Eve's comings and goings, and disturbed by what he sensed to be her new attitude toward him. He talked to God about it, and God, having his own problems with Adam and a somewhat broader perspective, was able to help out a little—but he was confused, too. Something had failed to go according to plan. As in the days of Abraham, he needed counsel from his children. “I am who I am,” thought God, “but I must become who I will become.”

And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.<sup>299</sup>

Through Plaskow's text, Lilith becomes a self-assured woman, who, in refusing to yield to the arbitrary authority of Adam, determines her own path and assists Eve in shirking the masculine oppression of the Garden of Eden.

The story of Lilith, and specifically Plaskow's version, already represents an alternative to the typically masculine and misogynist-driven narrative of the Fall of Man that restores a sense of agency to the women of the Bible and thereby enhances the

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Judith Plaskow, “The Coming of Lilith,” in *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*, ed. Donna Berman (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 32.

message behind Feuchtenberger's graphic narrative. With a protagonist that represents Lilith, Eve and Mary simultaneously in a format that recalls the moralistic narratives of medieval illuminated manuscripts, Feuchtenberger rewrites the story of the Fall of Man to highlight the misogyny and paternalistic oppression of the Judeo-Christian religion in general. Moreover, Feuchtenberger takes her criticism of religious dogma one step further to undermine religious teleology altogether through the incorporation of an upright-walking monkey, thereby suggesting an evolutionary narrative that contradicts Judeo-Christian doctrine.

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This graphic narrative about Marian La Luna is key to understanding other comics in Feuchtenberger's artistic production. In particular, it sets up the symbolic language required to interpret the feminist interventions of the following two stories, "Rosen" and "No Roses," as well as some of Feuchtenberger's poster work. In this sense, the Fall of Woman becomes the origin story for Feuchtenberger's *Kunstfigur*, and through the interpretive lens of this one graphic narrative, the spiral-haired protagonists of all of Feuchtenberger's subsequent comics are cast in a new light. With the serpent's head severed in all other representations of the spiral-haired figure, the reader assumes that each narrative begins with its protagonist already subverted and subjugated by masculine energies, making a feminist reading of Feuchtenberger's early graphic narrative not only productive but essential.

## **“Rosen” and “No Roses”: Engaging Feminine Mythologies to Deconstruct Gender Norms**

In her 1922 poem *Sacred Emily*, Gertrude Stein writes “A Rose is a rose is a rose.” Within this text and several of her subsequent poems, Stein continually returns to this formulation to playfully undermine the symbolism of the rose in literary traditions.<sup>300</sup> With the repetition of the symbol of the rose—as an object, a name, a metaphor and a symbol—Stein asserts that despite literature’s propensity for infusing this one type of flower with romantic meanings, it is in fact, just a rose. As Robert F. Fleissner surmises in his essay “Stein’s Four Roses,” “. . .the rose is really there, but it does not really say very much.”<sup>301</sup> Like Stein’s application of the same imagery, Feuchtenberger’s pair of graphic narratives “Rosen” and “No Roses,” titled in German and English respectively, also attack the metaphorical attachments of the rose to make a statement about the arbitrariness of its—and other gendered symbols’—signification. By engaging the symbol of the rose in “Rosen,” Feuchtenberger calls forth its associations with love and romance, only to deconstruct these conventions and tear apart its significations in the following graphic narrative, “No Roses.”

In *Mutterkuchen*, Feuchtenberger begins her engagement with the mythology of gender norms that continues in her collaboration with Katrin de Vries in *Die Hure H* series. “Die Strudel Petra” adopts the language of consumerism to engage myths on feminine subjectivity, while “Marian La Luna und der Gottvater” undermines the Biblical myth and patriarchal master narrative of the Fall of Man. The pair of comics “Rosen” and “No Roses” join these efforts by integrating conventional notions on gender norms and

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<sup>300</sup> Goethe’s “Heidenroslein,” Robert Burns’s “My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose,” Sir Edmund Spenser’s “Roses are red” from his epic *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet’s “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (Act II, Scene II).

<sup>301</sup> Robert F. Fleissner, “Stein’s Four Roses,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 6, no. 2 (April 1977), 326.

romantic symbolism that enter into popular discourses on identity to ultimately deconstruct them.

“Rosen” and “No Roses” establishes a series of dichotomies – nature versus the home, the garden versus the wild and the domestic space as a feminine domain and nature as masculine – that represent opposing sexualities and gendered subjectivities. The stories present the reader with a narrative rife with clichés and mythological symbols that through deeper analysis come undone to illustrate an inherent ambivalence. Through an examination of the ironic captioning, the action of the plot, and disjointed parallels between the narratives themselves, my reading reveals that, in fact, Feuchtenberger’s text undermines the gendered nature of these symbols that she superficially appears to posit.

The conception of myth most helpful for this type of analysis comes from Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957). For Barthes, myth is no longer associated with ancient gods and origin stories. Instead, it is simply a message disseminated by way of an institutionalized system of communication that has been socially constructed and imparts the assumed values and expectations of a given section of society. However, while Barthes writes that “[m]yth is a type of speech,” he in no way restricts mythology to oral communication. Myth is any form of representation.<sup>302</sup> Barthes thereby incorporates images into his analysis, and while he states that these forms are complicated by their mediation through the perspective of the artist, pictures and drawing – such as the forms of representation proliferated through commercial advertising or popular media – are also myth. For like the written word, these types of mythical images also require a *lexis*.<sup>303</sup> Reproducing the rhetoric of consumer capitalism in “Die Strudel Petra” and engaging

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<sup>302</sup> Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies* (New York: Noonday Press, 1991), 109.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

popular Biblical narratives, Feuchtenberger's texts already engage the type of myth Barthes identifies. However, Feuchtenberger's participation in the politics of gender and debates of female sexuality is another avenue through which she mobilizes Barthesian myth.<sup>304</sup>

Feuchtenberger's work presents contemporary notions of womanhood, femininity, and female sexuality through aphorism, symbolism and metaphor to first participate in these discourses and then complicate or undermine them. She sets her characters in surreal, dreamlike worlds to explore their own subjectivities, but Feuchtenberger positions their narratives in such a way as to complicate conventional senses of femininity and sexuality. Through the contradictions that emerge between a subjectivity defined by external expectations and imposed on the female body and the protagonist's own feminine subjectivity that contradicts a mythologized version of womanhood, Feuchtenberger places her characters – and specifically her spiral-haired protagonist – on paths that ultimately allow them to define their own senses of self.

Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives demystify hegemonic understandings of contemporary gender dynamics, thereby functioning as anti-myths. They utilize the same symbols as the contemporary myth on gender and relationships – the garden, the domestic space, the hunt and roses as tokens of affection, and engage Christian doctrine – but to a different end. Here Barthes' theory can help to tease out Feuchtenberger's deconstruction of feminine myths semiologically.<sup>305</sup> Instead of creating fictions and

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<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, the author herself has stated that she subscribes to this idea of the functionality of myth. Feuchtenberger has mentioned in an interview that she engages myth to do “very certain and biographical things,” Feuchtenberger, interview by Toshiki ““It's not just horror and black”,” n.p., and when asked to explain her conception of myth, Feuchtenberger similarly described it as a form of representation that communicates ideas circulating within society, Feuchtenberger in discussion with the author, June 2014.

<sup>305</sup> Barthes also addresses the myth of the womanhood in *Mythologies*.