

fairytale about relationships, as popular culture does, Feuchtenberger presents ugly truths about human sexuality that complicate popular notions on femininity, eschewing what Barthes identifies as “bourgeois mythology,” an idea which is seen reinforced by the attire of Strudel Petra's mother.

Returning to the subject of title of “Rosen” and “No Roses” underscores the effectiveness of adopting an Barthesian interpretive lens when reading Feuchtenberger’s graphic narratives, as roses also play an important role in Barthes’ attempt to theorize his semiology. In “Myth Today,” Barthes uses the symbol of the rose to clarify the relationship between the sign, signifier and signified. He writes:

Take a bunch of roses: I use it to signify my passion. Do we have here, then, only a signifier and a signified, the roses and my passion? Not even that: to put it accurately, there are here only 'passionified' roses. But on the plane of analysis, we do have three terms; for these roses weighted with passion perfectly and correctly allow themselves to be decomposed into roses and passion: the former and the latter existed before uniting and forming this third object, which is the sign. It is as true to say that on the plane of experience I cannot dissociate the roses from the message they carry, as to say that on the plane of analysis I cannot confuse the roses as signifier and the roses as sign: the signifier is empty, the sign is full, it is a meaning.³⁰⁶

Here, Barthes illustrates how an empty signifier can be transformed into a sign through the attribution of meaning (the signified). Similarly, once the signifier is warped through, for example, a story that turns the concept of the signified in on itself, the sign is transformed to posit a different meaning. Furthermore, with the above excerpt, Barthes exemplifies how potent a metaphor the rose has become, something Feuchtenberger also demonstrates within her pair of graphic narratives. Ultimately, in “Rosen” and “No Roses,” the cut roses of the title no longer represent affection, as contemporary popular culture would have us assume, but the captivity of the protagonist in the trappings of

³⁰⁶ Barthes, “Myth Today,” 111-112.

domesticity. Like Barthes' dissection of the meaning of the rose, the semiology of Feuchtenberger's roses is deconstructed through the action of the story, illustrating how the sign's relationship between the signifier and the signified is socially constructed.

* * *

Written in relation to each other, "Rosen" and "No Roses" work in tandem to propose an understanding of nature as the space in which Feuchtenberger works through the categories of femininity and masculinity. The title reinforces this metaphor, while also indicating that roses play a particularly important role in the gender dynamics that unfold over the subsequent ten panels of "Rosen" and fourteen panels of "No Roses." While symbolic roses punctuate the space around the title of "Rosen" (fig. 3.25), the roses are themselves integrated into the lettering of "No Roses" (fig. 3.26), immediately foregrounding a juxtaposition that not only exists in the language of the title panels (German and English, affirmative and negative) but also in the narratives themselves. By highlighting the contrasting elements of the two stories, I examine the relative positions of roses and nature in how the female protagonist defines her role as woman and sense of self.

Both "Rosen" and "No Roses" are told from the first person perspective of the female protagonist; however, while "No Roses" tells her story, "Rosen" first focuses on her male partner, ironically recounting all the ways in which he is devoted to the narrator, who only appears in the final panel.



Fig. 3.25: Feuchtenberger, “Rosen,” in *Mutterkuchen* (Berlin: Jochen Enterprises, 1995), n.p.

Fig. 3.26: Feuchtenberger, “No Roses,” in *Mutterkuchen* (Berlin: Jochen Enterprises, 1995), n.p.

“Rosen” opens with a menacing dog breaking through the wall of the domestic space also featured in later panels. This attack conjures up a movement through the types of spaces represented – from interior to exterior, from domestic to natural, from feminine to masculine – establishing the idea of transgression very early on. Emerging from behind the beast and holding the animal’s leash is the male protagonist of the story. Always represented with the viewpoint looking upward at him, giving him an equally menacing character as his canine companion, the two figures tramp through the woods on the hunt in search of a victim. By the third panel, the man has found and killed his prey. The unidentifiable spotted animal, perhaps a leopard, with which he returns, possesses oddly human facial features and eyelashes that recall the female protagonist’s eyebrows in the second graphic narrative, “No Roses.”

Once home, the man beheads, skins and disembowels the creature. He feeds the entrails to his dog, while he begins to prepare a soup out of the flesh, presumably for dinner. After seasoning the meal with herbs, the man carries the steaming bowl to the table, where the last panel presents him absorbed in eating the spoils of his successful hunt alone, surrounded by cut roses in vases. His dog lies peacefully on the verge of slumber at his feet, while his female partner vomits in the toilet in the next room in a

dress made out of his dinner's pelt – with plants puncturing the domestic space and spiders crawling around her feet (fig. 28).³⁰⁷

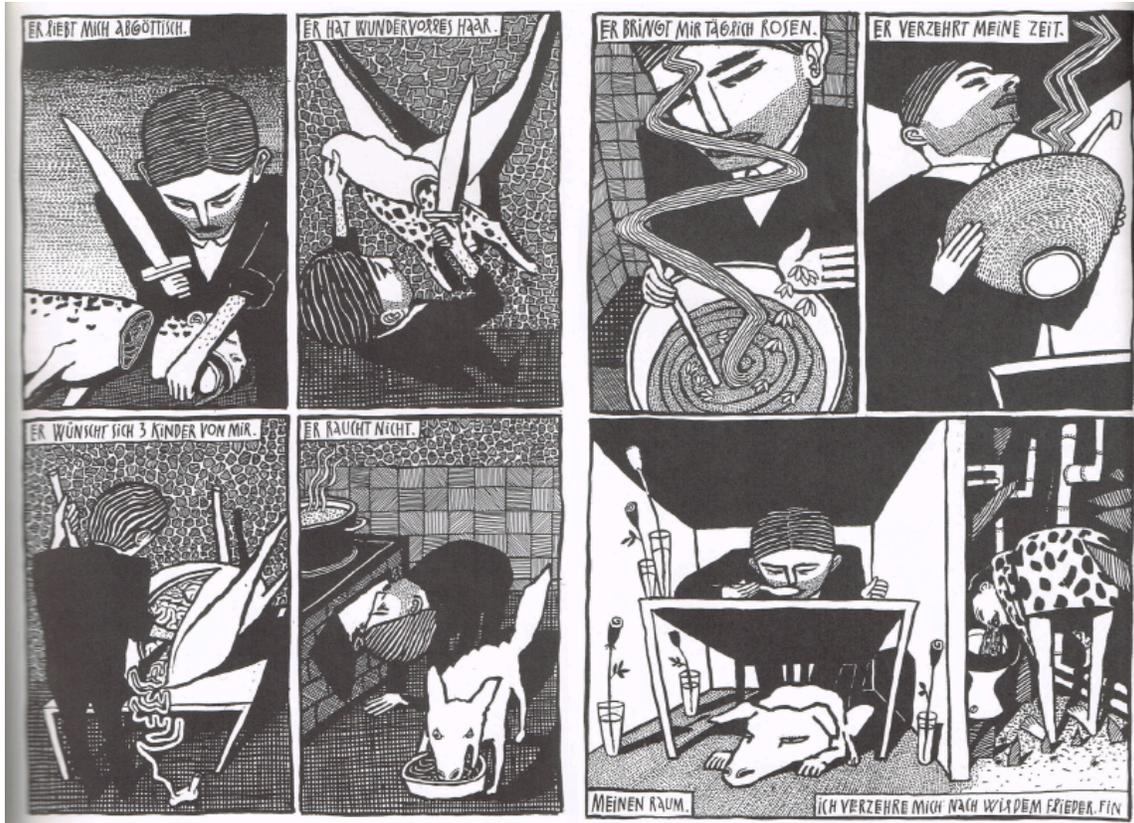


Fig. 3.27: Feuchtenberger, “Rosen,” n.p.

Fig. 3.28: “Feuchtenberger, “Rosen,” n.p.

This rather dramatic ending to a conventional masculine trope of the hunt, in which the man kills his prey to provide sustenance for the family, is striking and recontextualizes the whole story, while also informing the next. Having just witnessed the narrator’s violent predicament in the final panel, her statements in the preceding panels and the visual account of the hunt is cast in a different light. The final image and caption, “Ich verzehre mich nach wildem Flieder” [“I yearn for wild lilacs”], undermines the perceived earnestness of the captions populating the previous panels as well as the

³⁰⁷ Perhaps she could also be pregnant.

woman's comments on the same page (compare fig. 3.28 with fig. 3.27), rendering the graphic narrative's words in ironic juxtaposition to images. What began as a story seemingly about how much the protagonist is loved by her lover, how much he is devoted to her ("Er liebt mich abgöttisch," "He adores me") and how he brings her roses daily ("Er bringt mich täglich Rosen"), a seemingly romantic gesture, is recast by the hostility and suffocation implied by the final moments of the narrative. Furthermore, there suddenly appears to be multiple narrators, one verbal and one visual, expressing different perspectives in the same story – and even within the same panel – changing the ultimate understanding of the narrative retrospectively.

This ability to present multiple narrating forces is a feature of the comics medium that makes it particularly adapt to depicting ambivalence and complicated narrative structures. As the comics theorist Thierry Groensteen explains, comic narration can function on many registers and incorporate myriad narrative trajectories into a single page. In his essay "The Monstrator, the Recitant and the Shadow of the Narrator," Groensteen illuminates the layers of comic narration. He identifies three separate narrative arcs that operate simultaneously in many works of sequential art, concluding that only together do they construct the overarching narrative.

While dividing the comics form along visual/verbal lines is not unusual, Groensteen has adopted the language of French film scholar André Gaudreault to further articulate the layers of graphic narration. He identifies two threads of particular importance in the construction of the overarching narrative: the Monstrator, the graphic narrator or visual enunciator, and the Recitant, the verbal narrator or verbal enunciator. Together, the visual and the verbal, the Monstrator and the Recitant, form the narration.

Differentiating these two narrative techniques as written and drawn accomplishes some of the same goals, but it does not highlight the possibility of two separate narrative arches occurring within the same panel. Importantly, these two forms of narration work against each other in juxtaposition as often as they do in collaboration, illuminating the gap that exists between what is told and what is shown on a fundamental level. Groensteen’s language gives comics scholars the necessary tools to articulate when the Recitant intervenes in or contradicts the narration of the Monstrator, as occurs in “Rosen,” and vice versa, as exemplified in the subsequent graphic narrative, “No Roses.” Through the contradictions that exist on the level of visual-verbal narration, Feuchtenberger deconstructs the trilogy of sign, signifier and signified to dismantle the ties that bind the symbols of femininity, domesticity and endearment together.

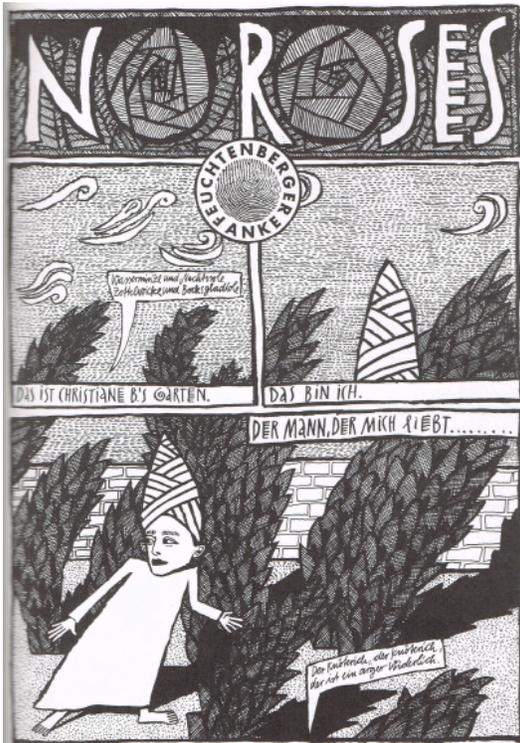


Fig. 3.29: Feuchtenberger, “No Roses,” n.p.

In Feuchtenberger's sequel to "Rosen," "No Roses," the Monstrator and Recitant work together as the female protagonist traverses an untamed garden alone, presumably the same garden referenced in the final panel of "Rosen." In the first panel, the garden is identified as Christiane B.'s, which, like Feuchtenberger's comic on the Fall of Woman, perhaps situates this garden as Biblical through the feminized name of Christ (fig. 3.29); however, this Garden of Eden has already been transformed by feminine energies. As the protagonist explores the outdoor space, plants tear and unravel her garments, until she stands naked at the shoreline. Importantly, as she passes through the foliage, the plants speak their names, a second reference to the Garden of Eden also alluded to in "Marian La Luna und der Gottvater," in which God created animals out of dust for Adam to name. Yet, the plants of Christiane B.'s garden name themselves.

These contradictions of Christian mythology immediately establish a juxtaposition. In Christiane B.'s garden, instead of exhibiting Christian mythology's masculine forces of creation, feminine power reigns. The figure wanders through a garden that recalls the Garden of Eden, but this garden is a feminine space in which the plants speak their own names and in which our protagonist rids herself of a subjectivity defined by a masculine presence as she frees herself of her clothing.

As the protagonist wanders through the garden, her dress – still bearing the leopard-like spots of the previous graphic narrative – is torn from her body, thereby removing an important symbol of masculine oppression established in "Rosen." This once again references the earlier untitled graphic narrative, "Marian La Luna und der Gottvater," in which God dresses Marian in order to subjugate her. In "No Roses,"

however, the opposite occurs, as the protagonist embraces her independence through her nudity.

Meanwhile the woman, who continues to seemingly play the role of Recitant, contradicts the narration of "Rosen" through captions articulating the flaws and failings of the man that loves her. While the first graphic narrative emphasized her lover's devotion and adoration, "No Roses," undermines his dedication. The Recitant informs the reader that the protagonist's lover is in fact an alcoholic, who is married to another woman with whom he already has five children. Despite this, however, he still "geht oft zu den Frauen" ["visits prostitutes"] even though "eigentlich will er was von Männer" ["he actually wants something from men"]. The tone and perspective has changed dramatically, which is depicted visually as well, with all panels presented head on or from above rather than from below as in "Rosen." In "No Roses," the Monstrator and Recitant have united in their narration of the panels, providing two types of information, verbal and visual, with the same goals: to restore to the protagonist a sense of self that is both naked and free.

As the narrative approaches its conclusion, it feigns closure. With the redundant question "Spricht nicht gerade für mich, was?" ["That does not say much for me, does it?"], the protagonist implies that her lover's shortcomings say something about her. However, this statement also draws attention to the role of speaking in the graphic narratives in general and imparts a second reading that calls into question who is actually speaking. It therefore also imply that what the narrator says is not actually saying anything – much like Stein's roses, anticipating the insincerity of its final word "Ende."

While this closing caption claims that we have reached the end of the graphic narrative, the figure returns for a last interjection that undoes the ending of the previous panel. With the assertion “Nein, nicht Ende!” [“No, not the end!”], the protagonist proclaims – in a speech balloon as opposed to a caption: “Wenn das nächste Mal wieder so ein dorniger Hauhechel die Hauptrolle hat, spiele ich nicht mehr mit!” [“When next time such a spiny restharrow³⁰⁸ has the leading role, I’m not playing along!”] Here the protagonist breaks the fourth wall to demand that she play the leading role in the story of her life (fig. 3.30).

Highlighting the very construction of the narrative *as a comic* as well as gender and speech as performative acts, Feuchtenberger's final panel takes the story off the page to engage the reader directly. The artist thereby makes the reader culpable in the perpetuation and ultimate distortion of the conventions of masculine storytelling. Feuchtenberger returns to the protagonist her voice so that she may speak for herself instead of letting the actions of her lover say something about her. Finally, by calling her lover by one of the plants in Christine B.'s garden, the imprisoned protagonist ends the graphic narrative reversing her subjugation.

³⁰⁸ Spiny restharrow a European woody herb (*O. repens*) with pink flowers, unifoliolate leaves, and long tough roots.

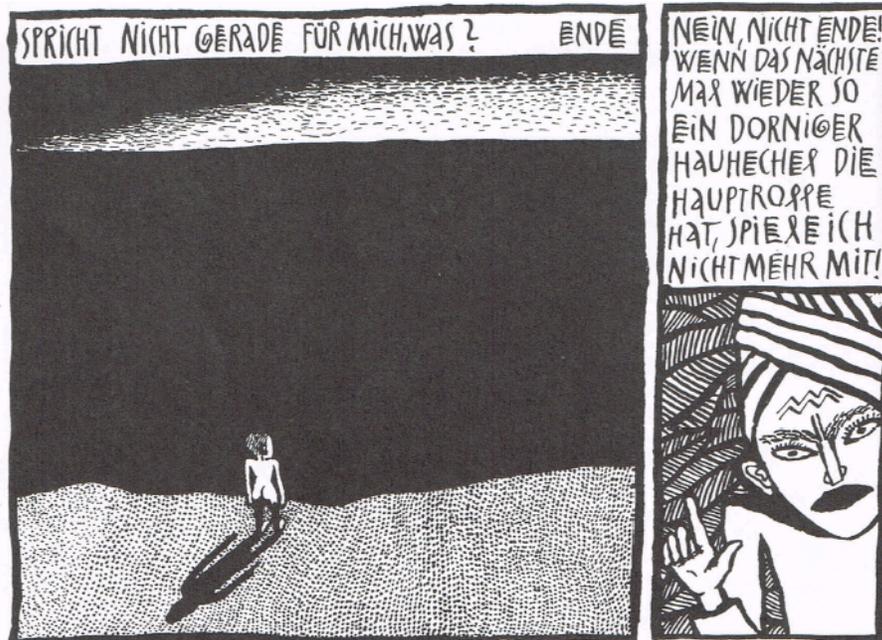


Fig. 3.30: Feuchtenberger, “No Roses,” n.p.

Like the story of *Der Frieder und das Catherlieschen*, the pair of graphic narratives “Rosen” and “No Roses” thematize feminine subjectivity and the construction of feminine identities. Through the freedom and symbolism of the untamed garden, which stands in juxtaposition to the forests in which the protagonist’s lover hunts in the earlier narrative, the roses of the title panels become not tokens of love as they are ironically identified in the *Rosen*, but clippings stolen from the protagonist’s garden that trap her through the conventions of hetero-normativity.

Conclusion: Feuchtenberger’s Feminist Graphic Expression

In *Mutterkuchen*, Feuchtenberger sets up the visual, verbal and narratological language that she engages for the rest of her artistic production. She brings together literary history, metaphor and myth to develop a new form of feminist graphic expression that seeks to undermine masculine conventions of storytelling and unite her feminist politics with the comics form. She strips bodies of their material possessions and real-

world contexts until her characters literally run naked across surreal landscapes and all objects emerge as metaphors potent with meaning. Like the clothing upon her protagonists' bodies, Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives unravel traditional notions of male-female relationships to posit a different set of gender dynamics. In "Die Strudel Petra," Feuchtenberger adapts a classic narrative of paternal morality and adopts the rhetoric of commercial advertising to forward a criticism of contemporary society and the oppression of feminine subjectivity and sexuality. In "Marian La Luna und der Gottvater," Feuchtenberger rewrites arguably the Western world's most important patriarchal master narrative to undermine the very foundation of the Christian religion. Finally, in "Rosen" and "No Roses," Feuchtenberger continues to dismantle gender norms. By deconstructing traditional dichotomies to redefine the symbols of femininity and masculinity, Feuchtenberger tears apart the signifieds, signifiers and signs of love, domesticity and romance, complicating contemporary conceptions of gender.

Through detailed analysis, Feuchtenberger's *Mutterkuchen* is revealed to be an important feminist project. While the content itself is only latently political without a particular agenda that openly declares itself, taken as a whole her work is unmistakably feminist. Feuchtenberger writes herself into her art through a spiral-haired *Kunstfigur* that simultaneously is and is not a self-representation, while the way in which words both emerge from and mark the female body renders the very process of writing corporeal. She thereby joins Helene Cixous' project on feminine writing³⁰⁹ to construct a feminine *and*

³⁰⁹ Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" was written at a pivotal moment in French feminist theory. It argued that literature and philosophy were inherently phallogocentric, leading Cixous to argue for political and social revolution through women's writing. Collapsing prose, philosophy and activism, "The Laugh of Medusa" appeals for the empowerment of female voices through the development of a new form of writing, calling for female authors to invent new and feminine modes of representation. This "feminine writing" would reconnect female writers with their bodies and encourage women to document their experiences of masturbation, sex and intimacy. Insisting that language is a possible form of political intervention, Cixous'

feminist form of graphic expression that undermines typically masculine types of narration to deconstruct and complicate myths of female subjectivity, womanhood and femininity, illustrating how women writing about women is itself a political gesture.

* * *

The image from the cover from *Mutterkuchen* (fig. 3.1) provides a visual representation of this project to develop a feminist form of graphic expression. The spiral-haired figure presented to the reader is the same one that has populated many of Feuchtenberger's theater and political posters. As both a representation of Feuchtenberger herself as well as an artistic experiment that stands in for all women, she is also the protagonist of most of the artist's early comics. Her eyes, a striking purple color, share their hue with the East German Women's Movement and thus recall Feuchtenberger's political engagement before and after German unification. The figure's breasts are barely recognizable, but her yellow nipples, placed on opposite sides of her torso just below her shoulders, contrast sharply with her emaciated body. Accompanied by a glare that is simultaneously menacing and all-knowing, she makes direct eye contact with the viewer, challenging her reader to gaze into her labia.

With her small breasts, exaggerated ears, strong brow, hunched posture and angular appendages, Feuchtenberger takes every precaution not to sexualize her spiral-haired protagonist. Yet, the figure's most striking element is still her vulva, which she pulls apart to present an interior view to her reader. However, instead of displaying her sex organs, the figure's exposed and stretched labia form a circle, revealing a blue universe within the woman's body. The implications here are twofold. At first glance,

treatise instructs women to write *as women* – to bring their bodies into dialog with their words – and in doing so, change the world.

Feuchtenberger's figure seems to be referencing the female role in human reproduction – that women have ultimately given birth to all of the individuals that populate our universe.

The second meaning, however, is more nuanced and relates to Feuchtenberger's attempt to develop a form of feminist graphic expression that unites the female body with the writing process. Situated as she is on the cover of *Mutterkuchen*, the woman's position suggests that all the content to follow flows out of the cosmos represented within her genitalia. This reading is reinforced by the title of the publication, *Mutterkuchen*, which is the German word for "placenta". While it is an appropriate title for Feuchtenberger's first book, as the themes of motherhood and birth are the most prominent, it references the volume's production as well, merging the process of artistic creation with bodily functions. As a collection of Feuchtenberger's comics from between the fall of the Berlin Wall and its publication, *Mutterkuchen* is the afterbirth of the author's first mature artistic endeavors in the comics medium. Moreover, as the cover art suggests, for Feuchtenberger, artistic production is akin to birth. The labor required yields a maternal relationship between the artist and her art, in which the graphic narratives become children and their publication is the afterbirth of that process. For Feuchtenberger, the vagina therefore represents a world of feminine creation, but it is also the physical mediator of her art. Feuchtenberger's stories emerge from within the bodies of her female protagonists, giving voice to the most powerful symbol of femininity, the vulva. With her legs spread across *Mutterkuchen*'s cover, Feuchtenberger's *Kunstfigur* sets the tone for reading her sequential art and frames her project to inscribe femininity into her art, which ultimately develops a new form of feminist graphic expression that unites both the form

and content of the artist's work with her feminist politics, the female body, and the semiology of gender.

CHAPTER IV

Die Hure H Trilogy: Deconstructing *W the Whore* and the Power of Sex

Namen sind schicksalshaft.
Wir wählen sie nicht,
sie werden uns zugeschrieben.
-Katrin de Vries, 2016

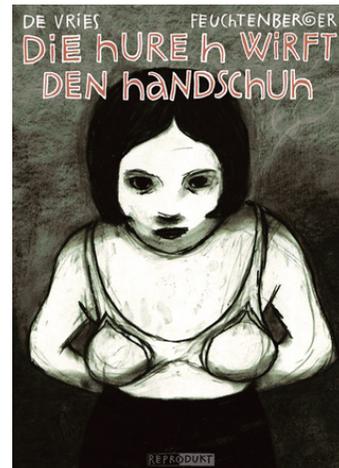


Fig. 4.1: Feuchtenberger and Katrin de Vries, *Die Hure H* (Berlin: Reprodukt, 1996), cover.

Fig. 4.2: Feuchtenberger and de Vries, *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen* (Zurich: Edition Moderne, 2003), cover.

Fig. 4.3: Feuchtenberger and de Vries, *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh* (Berlin: Reprodukt, 2007), cover.

The *Hure H* series, *W the Whore* in its English translation, is the preeminent example of Feuchtenberger's graphic narration. It is the most well known of her artistic production, the most influential body of her work and features the only title translated into English. Furthermore, it is also an important exercise in comic adaption. Consisting of three volumes, *Die Hure H* (1996, fig. 4.1; *W the Whore*), *Die Hure H zieht ihre*

Bahnen (2003, fig. 4.2; “W the Whore Makes her Tracks”) and *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh* (2007, fig. 4.3; “W the Whore Throws the Glove”), the series is a collaboration between Feuchtenberger and German author Katrin de Vries; yet, with the project spanning over a decade, during which the two artists never in fact worked side by side, the *Hure H* series is also a fascinating example of the way in which literature can be adapted into comic form to develop new and unexpected dimensions to the original prose. Furthermore, the third volume is almost entirely of Feuchtenberger’s own invention. This chapter therefore approaches the three volumes as texts produced primarily by Feuchtenberger’s creative and artistic direction, examining the artist’s visual and verbal contribution to the adaptation of de Vries’s prose, while setting it in conversation with its intertexts, primarily Camille Paglia’s *Sexual Personae* (1990), and relevant historical and contemporary contexts.

Deeply metaphorical and steeped in dense symbolism, the *Hure H* trilogy is dark, pessimistic and packed with illusive meanings and ambivalent messages. Each volume presents three short graphic narratives on the plights of its title figure, the *Hure H*. As a political gesture, the name of the protagonist and series aligns the entire project with the feminist activism of Feuchtenberger’s earlier work for the Independent Women’s Association and in *Mutterkuchen*. With H immediately marked by her status as whore, Feuchtenberger seeks to uncover, according the description on the back of the second volume, the cultural nexus hidden behind the cliché of the whore figure:

Die Hure H erlebt nicht das, was sich die Medien oder unser Allerweltswissen unter den Abenteuern einer Hure vorstellen mögen. Aber die Hure H-Geschichten spielen mit all dem, was der kulturelle Komplex “Hure” hinter seinen starren Klischees gewaltsam zu verbergen sucht, und machen die Schönheit und Gerfährlichkeit des Verborgenen erfahren.³¹⁰

³¹⁰ Feuchtenberger and Katrin de Vries, Back Cover, *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen*, Berlin: Reprodukt,

Through the abstracted representation of female experience, Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives impart a multifaceted survey of feminine experience that relies heavily on the metaphorical convergence of the images with text to undermine the protagonist's status as "whore." Together text and image build a complex story of the life of H that is not only in dialog with Feuchtenberger's other work, but it also produces a distinctly subjective reading experience through the comics format.

The stories themselves have no single interpretation. There are at times distinct narrative arches, but often, intelligible plotlines only emerge through intense scrutiny of a series of images and not without significant interpretive work by the reader. The text is sparse and poetic and the scenes represented appear as dreamlike (or nightmarish) manifestations of an abstracted imagined reality. Furthermore, the images tell their own story, often at odds with the text, adding supplementary and contradictory meaning that confuses and confounds the reader. Yet despite the visual and verbal perplexities, there also exist salient themes to assist the reader in finding meaning, even where there may be none. These are the narrative arches and leitmotifs I draw out in my analysis of the series.

The three volumes of the *Hure H* series progress chronologically, and the reader witnesses as H ages from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood. Simultaneously, Feuchtenberger's visual representation of the figure also progresses, and H becomes more realistically represented with every volume. Each narrative within the three publications presents a problem for which the protagonist seeks a solution. However, these problems – the desire of men, the aspiration towards beauty, the search for a husband, marriage in a white dress – are presented as societal expectations that H learns to disregard by the end of the final panel. She embraces another woman instead of learning to desire men; her

search for a husband leads her to the land of dead men and only leaving it is she set free; and she removes the white dress that freezes her body to find warmth in her nudity. Society's oppression is represented through layers of clothing, and H is only freed from the pejorative nature of her whore status when she unbinds her figure, lets down her hair or removes her dress. Embracing her body – angular and ugly or fleshy and round – therefore becomes the only path to H's freedom through the discovery of her authentic subjective experience as an individual woman and her own agency.

The first volume from 1996, *Die Hure H*, features the protagonist as a child. She is represented in the stark angular and disproportionate figuration of Feuchtenberger's early and largely expressionist art. Drawn in pencil, the panels maintain the same interest in the aesthetic of the woodcut print apparent in Feuchtenberger's *Mutterkuchen*, which was published only the year before, and many of the artist's theater and political posters. In three parts, we observe H navigate relationships with men and women, attend a fancy dress party and visit the house of childbirth. Her age is marked by the growth of her hair and maturity of her breasts, but she maintains a childlike understanding of the world around her, which appears to H as confusing and strange.

By the publication of *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen* in 2003, Feuchtenberger had returned to charcoal as her primary artistic tool and entered a new phase in her artistic production. The paneling of the second volume of the *Hure H* trilogy is less traditional and the images appear as if they occupy squares of paper pasted onto the page. The layout thereby frames the image. The texture of the panels and their background color, a soft grey that contrasts with the volume's cream-colored pages, differentiates the spaces between them, but no line exists to demarcate their separation. The title character has

grown into a young woman who spends the three graphic narratives consumed by her desire for the perfect marriage in the white dress in “Die Hure H will heiraten,” travels to the land of the dead in search of her prince in “Die Hure H wird älter. und immer,” and contemplates her aging body while lying on the train tracks paralyzed by her own freedom in “Die Hure H ist frei.”

In the 2007 release of the series, *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh*, the angularity and awkwardness of Feuchtenberger’s expressionist style that defined the aesthetic of the 1996 volume and remained significant in the 2003 edition has disappeared altogether. Here, Feuchtenberger continues to use charcoal, but her figuration is rounded and the space represented adopts the conventions of linear perspective. Where the previous incarnations of H were angular and disproportionate, the body of H in *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh* appears soft, supple and realistic.

In this final publication, the title figure has grown into a woman who takes a lover and becomes pregnant in “Leuchtturm,” travels with her baby to a strange postwar city in “Kohlenhof,” and wanders a surreal urban landscape of monkeys and skateboarders in “Ballsaal.” The half-page panels are dark and feature even fewer captions than the previous two *Hure H* publications. Looking to the original *Hure H* narratives by de Vries to understand this transition, it is clear that Feuchtenberger’s role in authoring these last three graphic narratives is more pronounced, with the final story entirely of her own design.

* * *

A striking element of the *Hure H* series is its title. Claiming “whore” as the name of the series’ protagonist is a bold move that leads to a number of interpretive

implications. The contemporary associations of “whore” situate the volumes’ title figure in a negative light, calling into question her morality and sexual promiscuity. Through an analysis of the stories themselves, however, a different understanding of Feuchtenberger’s whore emerges that undermines the pejorative nature of the term. While the protagonist is often portrayed naked with many of the graphic narratives pivoting around her sexual relationships, H’s name nevertheless begs the questions: how is she actually a whore? And what is Feuchtenberger doing by claiming this pejorative her their title character? This chapter investigates the whore status of Feuchtenberger’s protagonist to examine in which ways the author draws connections between sexual promiscuity and the figure of H in order to show how Feuchtenberger’s adaptation of de Vries’s prose engages and deconstructs the mythology of the whore, criticizes heteronormativity and demonstrates the power of sex. Closing with an analysis of Camille Paglia’s feminist polemic *Sexual Personae* (1990), this chapter posits Feuchtenberger’s understanding of femininity, nature and the role of women in the *Hure H* series as one lifted from this contentious text.

Ist H eine Hure?: W the Whore and her Desire to Desire Men

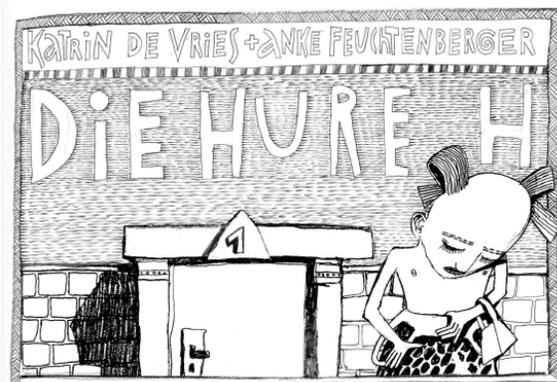


Fig. 4.4: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” in *Die Hure H* (Berlin: Reprodukt, 1996), n.p.

The introductory graphic narrative of the *Hure H* series underscores the sexual nature of Feuchtenberger's engagement with the concept of the whore and thematizes the protagonist's whore status literally (fig. 4.4). The title panel features the main character with her eyes cast downward as she sheepishly examines her dress, the top of which is folded down to reveal her small, child-like breasts. Her hair, tied back in such a way as to appear to form a bow when looking at her head-on, accentuates the childishness of her immature body. She stands to the right of her front door in high heels with a purse on her arm, her hair penetrating the walls of the title panel. Above her reads her name, "die Hure H," which also functions as the title of the graphic narrative, with a single number one as the headstone of the door, indicating its order in this first volume, where all three graphic narratives bare the same name.

The aesthetic of this panel and all subsequent panels in the first volume of the *Hure H* series is highly stylized. Feuchtenberger's pencil-work is detailed and precise, while at the same time baring the trace of the artist's hand. The absence of absolutely straight lines and the way in which the lines and markings penetrate the various spaces inside and outside of the panel seemingly unintentionally remind the reader that while mimicking the aesthetic of the woodcut print, Feuchtenberger drew all the visual content by hand. It is immediately clear that Feuchtenberger did not use a ruler whatsoever in the construction of her panel layout and representation of space. Linear perspective is thereby complicated, with the illusion of three-dimensional space constructed through layering, thickness of line-work and shadows. The repetition in line-work and patterning emphasizes the precise handling of Feuchtenberger's drawing. It reflects both the repetition required of comics construction in general with it sometimes monotonous and

repetitious narrative and illustration, while also flattening the space within the panel, thereby further disrupting the sense of reality.



Fig. 4.5: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.

The narrative begins in the third person. The caption above H reads: “Die Hure H verliess das Haus” [“W the Whore leaves the house”] (fig. 4.5). Before we move on to the next page, however, H has returned to the house. We learn that when she initially departed in that first panel, she was leaving behind a man, who had left the house by the time of her return. With the door ajar, the caption above reads: “Als sie wiederkam, war der Mann weg” [“When she came back, the man was gone”]. Inside the house, the viewer is presented with an environment that starkly contrasts with the rectilinear nature of the building’s exterior, thereby demarcating the aesthetics of masculine and feminine spaces. The walls are curved and come to an arch overhead, with the ground also featuring some oddly shaped non-rectangular brickwork that reinforces the rounded nature of the interior space. In contrast to the open space outside, the claustrophobic interior of H’s house feels more like a cave than a residence. Through the window at the far end of the room, we see a garden overgrown with plants, making the utter absence of plant life outside of the building and within the subsequent panels all the more apparent.



Fig. 4.6: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.

Fig. 4.7: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.

As H searches for the man, she presents the reader with an idea and word that repeats itself throughout this graphic narrative. She comments: “Wo ist der Mann geblieben. Ich wollte ihn doch begehren” [“Where is the man. I wanted to desire him”]. This “begehren,” which means “to desire” with sexual connotations, makes a repeated appearance throughout this story, and the process by which H learns – or fails to learn – how to desire is the foundation for the action of the plot.

Turning to leave once again (fig. 4.6), H goes in search of the man, only to find him crouched behind a fence defecating (fig. 4.7). When she inquires as to what he is doing, he replies: “Ich muss mich entleeren” [“I have to empty myself”]. The situation in which H finds the man, smoking and unshaven evacuating his bowels with very little regard for the woman searching for him, suggests to the viewer that the man H wishes to desire is unworthy of it. She expresses her intentions again, “Ich wollte dich begehren” [“I wanted to desire you”], to which the man responds curtly, “Dann tu es” [“Then do it”]. Standing up, the man appears to fasten his pants. However, this gesture is ambivalent, and at the same time, it looks as if he is undoing his pants, perhaps implying that the act of “desiring” him is in fact the performance of fellatio.

Still crouched, H expresses that she does not remember how to “desire” the man (“Es fällt mir nicht mehr ein. Ich habe es vergessen;” “I don’t remember anymore. I have forgotten”), to which the man comments that he does not know how H would go about desiring a man (“Ich weiss nicht wie die Hure H. den Mann begehrt;” “I don’t know how W the Whore desires”). The explicit connection between H’s name and sexually charged desire reinforces that the whore prefix of her name is in fact indicative of the protagonist’s supposed sexual immorality, while also confirming that the act of desire in general is sexual in nature.

However, it also illustrates how H’s desire for men and performance of sexual satisfaction is not an innate ability. So is it something that you learn? The absolute lack of chemistry or visible sexual attraction between the two figure forces the reader to question what “desire” even means to H in this context. The juxtaposition of the text and the images contradict and therefore interrogate the very existence of desire. It is clearly not something that works in the encounter between these two. Feuchtenberger thereby deconstructs the verb “begehren” at the intersection of text and image, as H looks for desire in another but ultimately, as we shall also see in her next encounter, does not find it.

The two walk along the fence as the man suggests that perhaps he should instruct H how to desire him by showing her how he performs the task (fig. 4.8, “Vielleicht soll ich dich begehren. Dann weisst du wie ich dich begehre. Und danach hast du es gelernt. Danach kannst du mich begehren;” “Maybe I should desire you. Than you know how I desire you. And after you will have learned it. After you can desire me”). In a garden reminiscent of the plant life visible through the window at the rear of H’s house, the man performs his service and “...bald hatte der Mann die Hure H. begehrt” [“...soon the man

had desired W the Whore”]. Once again, desire is positioned as synonymous with sexual desire, consistent with the pejorative nature of the protagonist’s status as “whore.”



Fig. 4.8: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.



Fig. 4.9: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.

As the man continues smoking, H is presented seated and crying in the grass (fig. 4.9). With the panel perspective moving from looking upward at the protagonist to viewing her from above, the expression of hopefulness from the previous panel has vanished, as we now look down upon H amongst the foliage sobbing. The implication here is possibly that he raped her; however, in light of the earlier panel that alludes to expression of desire as perhaps oral sex as well as the implied necessity of turn-taking, it could be that the man performed cunnilingus on H, a sexual act that figures importantly in a scene to come. Ultimately, Feuchtenberger’s narrative and visual strategies remain vague and no concrete conclusion can be reached.

The man begins smoking again as he stands and curtly asks: “Was ist” [“What’s wrong”]. The absence of a question mark is in direct contradiction with the verb placement, which implies the comment is in fact a question. The lack of punctuation therefore produces a reading of the man’s response as detached, uninterested and dismissive. Following his next statement “Ich habe dich begehrt” [“I desired you”] with a final defeatist “Und jetzt das” [“And now this”] leaves the reader with the feeling that the

man believes that H should be grateful for his efforts to teach her desire. Finally, this series of panels confirms the reader's understanding of the text's use of "desire" as equated with carnal pleasure.

* * *

When reading the *Hure H* trilogy, it is important to remember the process of its collaborative production. While Feuchtenberger and de Vries both contributed to the series, they did not work together in the production of the text and images. In the case of the first volume, de Vries sent her prose to Feuchtenberger after becoming an admirer of the artist's work, which she first encountered in the feminist magazine *Ypsilon*.³¹¹ Feuchtenberger then immediately began to set de Vries's words to image, but neither contributor consulted the other in the process of producing their work.³¹² The images and text of the *Hure H* series thereby function both independently as well as together with the text, producing two separate narratives that are also to be read together in Feuchtenberger's ultimate adaptation. Recalling Groenstein's differentiation between the levels of narration—the visual, the verbal and the way they work together—it is essential to simultaneously read the images and text of *Die Hure H* as independent works of art, while also stitching them together in the intellectual production of the graphic narrative's overarching meaning – elusive as it may be. So while the images and text of this first story of H lend themselves to an interpretation of the textual reference to "behehren" ("desire") as sexual desire, neither rape nor oral sex are obvious allusions in de Vries's initial text. These are therefore layers to the story the Feuchtenberger constructs on her own.

³¹¹ Katrin de Vries, e-mail message to author, August 21, 2016.

³¹² Feuchtenberger in conversation with the author, June 2016.

This layering of narrative graphically and textually calls into question the hierarchy of text and image in the work of Feuchtenberger and de Vries – and maybe the comics medium in general. What aspect of these graphic narratives informs the reader’s interpretation most? On what level do the key moments of understanding occur? And what is the consequence of narrative textual or visual ambivalence? For Feuchtenberger’s art in general, the images reign supreme. This is both a consequence of the poetic quality of the text as well as its language’s general ambivalence, both of which require the accompanying images to make sense of the action of the prose. However, there is also the way in which the images set the tone for the language. The dramatic changes in perspective, tonal qualities in the shading, and the sketchiness of the overall line-work inform the emotional inflection of the language, perhaps generating an entirely different reading than de Vries’s text would otherwise produce on its own. Furthermore, Feuchtenberger’s images strengthen the ambiguities of the text at some points while making others more explicit. In my communication with de Vries, she emphasized how there are multiple interpretations available in reading her prose.³¹³ In combination with Feuchtenberger’s art – which de Vries also stressed moves beyond pure illustration – the artist offers one avenue of interpretation, and one that it could be argued is similarly open to interpretation.

Returning to the artist’s illustration of the concept of “begehren,” it is important to reiterate that while Feuchtenberger implies rape or oral sex has taken place, through the seated position of the protagonist and the male figure’s conventional post-coital cigarette, she does not actually illustrate the act. In this way, Feuchtenberger maintains the space

³¹³ de Vries, e-mail message to author, August 21, 2016.

for interpretation present in de Vries's text while still offering an avenue for understanding the artist's own reading of the text.

* * *



Fig. 4.10: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.
 Fig. 4.11: Feuchtenberger, “No Roses,” n.p.

After a second attempt at teaching H to desire (“Begehre mich noch einmal... Vielleicht lern ich es beim zweiten Mal;” “Desire me one more time... Maybe I’ll learn it with a second time”), H decides to walk alone along the fence (“Ich muss alleine am Zaun entlanggehen,” “I must walk alone along the fence”) until she reaches the end of the wall, where the countryside begins (“Die Hure H blickte ins Land;” “H the Whore looked onto the countryside”). There she sees a woman’s house. She introduces herself and asks to visit (“Ich bin die Hure H. Ich möchte dich besuchen;” “I am W the Whore. I would like to visit you”).

With her hands sunken into a pale of water (fig. 4.10) and linens hanging outside of her door, the woman of the house is busy doing laundry. Her bosom, full and mature, contrast starkly with childlike breasts of the *Hure H*, as does her voluptuous figure. She wears a dress that covers her body, and her hair is bound upright by white bands that

recall the hairstyle of the protagonist in *Mutterkuchen*'s "No Roses" (fig. 4.11), which is an early reference to a narrative that re-emerges thematically in my analysis of the role of Paglia in the *Hure H* series. The woman invites H in to visit and begins to unbind her hair. H and the woman, who like the man of the story bares no name, lie down in a bed that is located in the second room of the house, where H begins to undress the woman. In the next panel, H and the women are presented from above as they kneel facing one another, both wearing the upper portion of their dresses around their waists.

In comparison to the mode of representation used to depict H's interaction with the man, the two female figures are presented as equals, both maintaining similar positions. Their sense of connection is stressed in the tenderness of their touch and by their eye contact in almost every panel, reinforcing the sense of H's alienation in the earlier panels and her sexual relations with the man.



Fig. 4.12: Feuchtenberger, "Die Hure H," n.p.

Again, unsure as to how to proceed, H asks: "Was soll ich tun?" ["What should I do?"] (fig. 4.12). Here the woman takes the initiative. In the following panel, the space around the two figures changes dramatically. They no longer lie in the bed together; instead, they are seated as the woman undoes H's hair from behind. The landscape of the room has changed as well, and the two now sit in a circular space that is punctuated by

the same foliage visible in the garden behind H's house and in the field where H and the man performed their sex act. Above the two figures reads a caption: "Die Frau tat etwas" ["The woman did something"]. Much like in the panels in which the male figure attempts to teach H desire, the ambiguity of the text is reflected in Feuchtenberger's accompanying imagery. It is clear from the first panel on the following page, that the two women have not left the bed physically ("Die Hure H und die Frau blieben im Bett;" "The Hure H and the woman stay in bed"); yet the imagery suggests an entirely different space. These three panels must therefore be read symbolically to determine the way in which Feuchtenberger is interpreting the text visually to produce supplemental meanings.



Fig. 4.13: Feuchtenberger, "Die Hure H," n.p.



Fig. 4.14: Feuchtenberger, "Die Hure H," n.p.

In the next panel, the foliage has vanished and in its place are six fish circling the two women (fig. 4.13). As the bed sheets encroach on their space from the lower right corner, the upper caption reads: "Die Hure H wusste nicht, was sie riechen wollte" ["The Hure H did not know what she wanted to smell"]; below, the caption reads: "Die Hure H wusste nicht was sie berühren sollte" ["The Hure H. did not know what she wanted to touch"]. Swimming fish are a frequent symbol in Feuchtenberger's art. Important in the episode of Bärmi und Klett (fig. 4.15) and "Living next door to Alicie" (fig. 4.16) in *Mutterkuchen*, they accentuate a sense of surreality and alienation. Here, however, in

connection to this homosexual sex act between the women and in the context of previous references to oral sex, they appear to be referencing the vagina and, more specifically, cunnilingus. The circular form adopted by the panel space is reminiscent of other references to the vulva and vagina in Feuchtenberger's early work (fig. 4.17 and 4.18), while the fish themselves and the caption's reference to smell allude to the vaginal scent. Yet, once again, H sits sobbing with her hair falling flatly on either side of her head, leading the reader to question yet again to what extent this sex act was consensual.



Fig. 4.15: Feuchtenberger, “Bärmi und Klett,” n.p.

Fig. 4.16: Feuchtenberger, “Living Next Door to Alice,” n.p.

Fig. 4.17: Feuchtenberger, untitled comic, n.p.

Fig. 4.18: Feuchtenberger, *Mutterkuchen*, cover.

In the following panel, the environment has changed once again, much like the relationship between the women. Both figures now float naked in opposite directions amidst the swimming fish, which no longer swim around the figures in a circular pattern but among and between them. Above the women reads: “Die Frau wusste, was sie riechen wollte. Die Frau wusste, was sie berühren wollte” [“The woman knew what she wanted to smell. The woman knew what she wanted to touch”]. H’s look has also changed, and her hair now stands upright in the spiral pattern, though separated into two separate strands on either side of her head. Familiar to the reader from Feuchtenberger’s protagonist in *Mutterkuchen* and the *Kunstfigur* from many of the artist’s political and

theater poster, this rendering of the protagonist’s hair creates a connection between the *Hure H* series and Feuchtenberger’s other work, maintaining links to the feminist aesthetics in *Mutterkuchen* and the rest of Feuchtenberger’s artistic production.

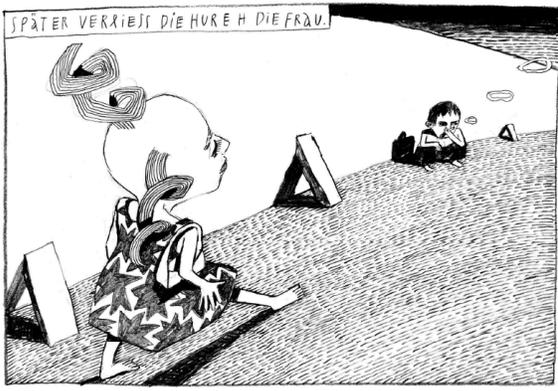


Fig. 4.19: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H,” n.p.

In the second to last panel, we see H leaving the woman’s house (fig. 4.19, “Später verliess die Hure H. die Frau”). Without her high heels and now wearing the woman’s dress, the *Hure H* walks confidently back toward her house along the fence and past the man, who again sits crouched and smoking. With her garment no longer folded down at her waist, H’s breasts are also no longer revealed. As she passes the man on her left and enters the house, the captions read at the top left and bottom right of the two final panel reads: “Ich gehe zurück ins Haus. Sagte die Hure H... und ging an dem Mann vorbei” [“I am going back into the house. Said the Hure H... and passes by the man”].

The syntax of these last panels is complicated. The single caption in the first, for example, has two meanings. While it clearly describes the process by which H leaves the woman’s house, the second meaning is much more abstract. With it unclear grammatically whether the woman is the accusative object or nominative subject due to the feminine gender of the noun, the sentence reads “later, the *Hure H* left the woman,” meaning both that H departed the woman as well as left *as* the woman. Moreover, clothed

as she is in the woman's dress, it is apparent that an important transition has taken place. H now walks self-assured with her head held high. She passes by the man without a glance and turns into her house. She is no longer the girl that sought to desire the man, but a woman that has no need for such desire, and importantly, it was a sexual encounter with another woman that empowered her.

* * *

This first story in the *Hure H* trilogy sets the tone for all of the following graphic narratives in the series. It introduces our protagonist and establishes the series' most important leitmotif: the power of sex. Throughout the subsequent eight stories, the intersection between power, sex and relationships—heterosexual, homosexual, maternal—remain focal points for Feuchtenberger. This also opens up the multilayeredness of the trilogy's title and principle character. Feuchtenberger's adaptation illustrates that H is much more complicated than her name indicates. Furthermore, despite the category of "Hure" attached to her name, she does not embody whorishness in the conventional sense whatsoever. Her status as whore is rendered a gross oversimplification that becomes apparent, first, in the protagonist's inability to desire men appropriately and, later, in the collapse between H's characterizations as virgin, whore and mother to virgin-whore-mother.

So what are Feuchtenberger and de Vries doing by adopting such a loaded designation as the title for their protagonist? And what does "whore" really mean in the context of these three publications? Even in this first graphic narrative, the answers to these questions begin to emerge, and a conception of female sexuality and promiscuity surfaces from within its panels that is much more complicated than the whore/virgin

dichotomy would suggest. Here, H has no innate sense of desire; she feels she must learn it. H appears not to be acting out of a natural inclination towards sexual expression but one that is learned and expected. With her dress folded at her waist, her immature breasts revealed to the viewer and her oversized high heels, Feuchtenberger initially fashions H into a sexual object. Her childishness embodied by her nascent breasts and bow-like hairstyle further reinforces this reading, contrasting the figure's virgin-like appearance with her status as whore, both elements of sexual fetishization.

Upon visiting the woman in her house, however, a transition occurs. This figure of the woman, while represented as a second individual, features many of H's own characteristics, though in a more mature form. The two women share similar facial features, including the rendering of their eyes, eyebrows, mouth and nose, and in the panel in which they are represented kneeling in front of each other (fig. 4.12), the two figures appear as mirror images from different points in time. Furthermore, by taking the second reading of the caption describing H's departure literally – that the Hure H leaves *as the woman* – the sexual encounter between the woman and H suddenly seems less homosexual than masterbatory. While a problematic conflation in terms of sexual politics, this move makes an important statement in terms of understanding Feuchtenberger's protagonist's search for self-determination and agency. Only through knowing her own female sexuality is H capable of desire. However, once she experiences female sexual pleasure, she has no inclination to subvert her desire to satisfy men. With her breasts covered, her high heels discarded, and her hair unbound, an act associated with sexual liberation in *Mutterkuchen*, H is no longer a sexual object for the pleasure of others. And ignoring the man smoking along the fence, she reenters her house.

“Nichts darf schmutzig werden”: W the Whore and the Trappings of Heteronormativity

In the second volume of the *Hure H* series, *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen*, Feuchtenberger continues to play with the pejorative conventions of heteronormativity. The graphic narratives are longer in this second volume, and Feuchtenberger’s artistic style has altered dramatically. With the exception of the three full-page title panels, each page presents the reader with two square panels that, without a distinct border, appear to have been pasted on the cream-colored page. Feuchtenberger’s representation of the body of her protagonist has transformed from the angular and disproportionate rendering of her early expressionist work to a more realistic and rounded portrayal that accentuates H’s femininity.

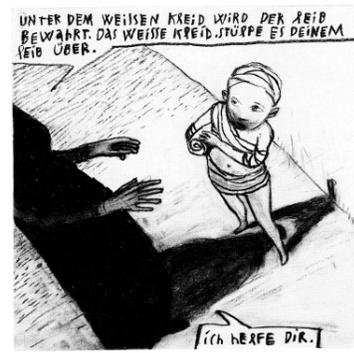


Fig. 4.20: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” in *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen* (Zurich: Edition Moderne, 2003), 3.

Fig. 4.21: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 9.

Fig. 4.22: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 12.

In the first story, H decides that she wants to marry (fig. 4.20, “Die Hure H will heiraten;” “W the Whore wants to marry”). However, for the protagonist, this endeavor is less about the marital union than the white dress (fig. 4.21, “Ich will das Kleid tragen;” “I want to wear the white dress”). She encounters an elderly woman in dark shades of black and gray who advises her simply: “Dann ziehe das weisse Kleid an. Und dann geschieht

es” [“Than put on the white dress. And then it will happen”]. H then inquires: “Was geschieht” [“What happens”]. Unfortunately, however, the woman in black knows not because she never wore the white dress (“Ich habe kein weisses Kleid getragen. Deshalb weiss ich nicht was beim weissen Kleid geschieht;” “I did not wear a white dress. That is why I don’t know what happens when one wears the white dress”). As the conversation progresses, the old woman reveals that she instead wore a black dress. The white dress, the woman continues, will protect the body (fig. 4.22, “Unter dem weissen Kleid wird der Leib bewahrt;” “Under the white dress the body is protected”), and she helps the *Hure H* construct her marital gown out of a piece of linen (fig. 4.23). Once dressed, the old woman asks how H’s body feels (fig. 4.24). H responds that she feels nothing (fig. 4.25) and grows distressed that the dress is becoming dirty (“Ich fühle nichts. Und der Saum des Kleides wird schmutzig;” “I don’t feel anything. And the seam of the dress is getting dirty”), which she spurns in the following panel (“Nichts darf schmutzig werden;” “Nothing is allowed to get dirty”). Already, the dress figures as a symbol of an idea – marriage – that does not map on to H’s reality.



Fig. 4.23: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 14.

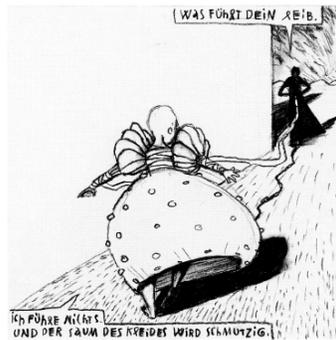


Fig. 4.24: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 17.

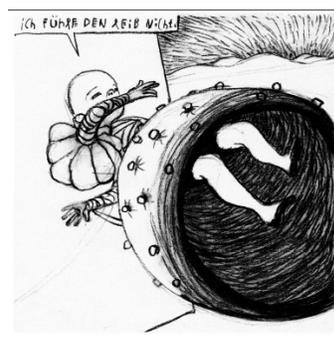


Fig. 4.25: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 19.

Now in her white dress, H wanders to the tower where she anticipates her marriage will take place, but she becomes confused and disoriented by her inability to

feel her own body. The promised protection of the white dress thereby begins to manifest as numbness. Obsessed with the inevitability of her white dress becoming dirty (“Du hast Schwarz getragen, sagt die Hure H. Bei dir konnte nichts schmutzig werden,” “Nichts darf schmutzig werden, horst du;” “You wore black, said W the Whore. With you nothing could get dirty,” “Nothing is allowed to get dirty, do you hear me”), H is swept up in a gust of wind and begins to float away. As she approaches the top of the tower, H pauses for a moment to look through the window. There she sees six woman, clothed in dirty white dresses much like her own, trapped within the tower, motionless and floating at the ceiling (fig. 4.26).

Now standing atop of the tower, H can finally feel her body again, but it is freezing (“Ich spüre meinen Leib. Mein Leib friert;” “I feel my body. My body freezes”). The old woman releases the band of cloth that tethered H to her and the ground below and enters the tower. As H hears the door slam behind her, she feels the first drops of rain. H, soon drenched in the downpour, walks solemnly across a darkly shaded panel, her white dress turning black in the downpour, as she resolves to rid herself of the gown (fig. 4.27, “Ich muss das Kleid ausziehen, denkt die Hure H;” “I must take the dress off, thinks W the Whore”). In the final panel, H glances back at her removed garments as the pouring rain begins to ease. The dress lies in a dark heap, smoke rising from the gathered cloth (fig. 4.28). Now naked, H’s expression has softened. A slight smile crosses her face as she looks back at the dress she so coveted and thinks: “Ich muss meinen nassen Leib wärmen” (“I must warm my wet body”).



Fig. 4.26: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 22.



Fig. 4.27: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 26.



Fig. 4.28: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H will heiraten,” 26.

This first graphic narrative in the second volume of the *Hure H* trilogy presents a profound criticism of the institution of marriage. The story takes the symbol of the white dress as its point of entry, revealing the impossibility of maintaining the purity it embodies, while also illustrating the constricting and discordant nature of the marital institution. The idealization of the perfect wedding in the white dress is at odds with the reality of the ceremony and union itself, embodied by the floating bodies – perhaps corpses – at the top of the tower.

Moreover, the white dress is intended to symbolize sexual purity. That the white dress can never remain white also draws out contradictions in the fetishization of female virginity. Instead of representing the wedding as a celebration, this graphic narrative implies that marriage and the white dress oppress women. H cannot feel her body until it is freezing, and only through ridding herself of the white dress – now black – and the conventions of heteronormativity can she bask in the freedom and warmth of the sun.

* * *



Fig. 4.29: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H ist frei,” in *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen* (Zurich: Edition Moderne, 2003), 53.



Fig. 4.30: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H ist frei,” 59.

The subsequent two graphic narratives continue to grapple with the tropes of heteronormativity and their impact on female emancipation and empowerment. In the second story, H goes in search of her prince in the land of the dead only to find corpses, where she also ultimately finds her freedom – though only momentarily – when she rids herself of childish fantasies of fairytale happy-endings. Lastly, the third and final graphic narrative of recounts how H, paralyzed by the possibility of freedom, lies down on the train tracks (fig. 4.29).

Like the clichéd “damsel in distress” of children’s cartoons, H is fated to be executed by an oncoming train. Feeling the heaviness of her own bones and contemplating her aging body, H is helpless to save herself. She desires only to remain lying and “Bahnen ziehen,” which in contrast to her stationary position means “to move quickly” or, idiomatically, “to make tracks.” This is also where the title of the second volume of the *Hure H* series comes from, highlighting the ambivalence of both acting and not acting at the same time, while also providing Feuchtenberger with the inspiration for the imagery for this third graphic narrative in the collection. Incorporating the imagery of the train tracks and the trope of the damsel in distress alters the reading of the original

prose by de Vries profoundly, undermining both H's status as whore and categorization as helpless. This damsel in distress doesn't need saving.

Ultimately, as the panel reads, the Hure H. "...zieht einige Bahnen" [...makes some tracks"]. This phrasing breaks with the conventions of the idiomatic expression to literalize the moment of the *Hure H's* enlightenment, as she concludes that lying there was not the goal: "Dieses auf der Erde liegen ist nicht das Ziel. Hier ist sie nicht frei" ["This lying on the earth is not the goal. Here, she is not free"]. Unlike the convention of the stranded damsel in distress tied to the railway tracks, H rises of her own volition directly in front of an approaching train, which continues to follow her as she runs along the tracks towards a city (fig. 4.30). There she meets an old woman who insists that her freedom is an illusion, an assertion I will return to in the conclusion of this chapter, before entering into a room with a large glass enclosure in which another whore sits, gazed upon by a room full of men. Disillusioned of her own freedom, H leaves the city again, as the decrepit elderly woman laughs.

Die grosse mächtige Hure H: W the Whore and the Power of Sex

The third and concluding volume of the *Hure H* series, *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh*, features yet another aesthetic shift, though this time it is not nearly as pronounced as between volumes one and two. This final book exhibits a slightly more realist aesthetic and propensity for spatial depth less developed in the earlier volumes. Feuchtenberger's use of charcoal and shading has evolved dramatically from her artistic endeavors between between 1989 and 2006, creating the illusion of space and accentuating the delicate details of subtle hand gestures, facial expressions and movement.

The style of storytelling has also evolved, which may have to do with Feuchtenberger's more creative role in authoring both text and image for some parts of the publication.³¹⁴

The text is sparser and the images impart most of the narrative, which is even more amorphous and surreal than those of the previous two publications. Once again featuring two panels per page, *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh*'s panel layout this time appears to be drawn onto the page of the book, with unruled though relatively straight lines demarcating the panel borders.



Fig. 4.31: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” in *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh* (Berlin: Reprodukt, 2007), n.p.

Fig. 4.32: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

Fig. 4.33: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

Unlike the transition from the first to the second volume, the third installment of the *Hure H* series appears to pick up where the second left off. After an imageless title page that reads “Leuchtturm” in Feuchtenberger’s own handcrafted font, the caption of the first panel observes: “Die Hure H wandert weiter” [“W the Whore wanders further”] (fig. 4.30). The accompanying image is of a woman exiting a city, which looms largely behind her in the second panel. Smoke stacks spew fumes into the atmosphere, which float above her in shades of grey, like the color of the strips of cloth that band her face (fig. 4.31). Unlike previous incarnations of H, the figure is presented in a tightly collared frock that buttons up her neck. In the distance, at the end of a long boardwalk, stands a

³¹⁴ Feuchtenberger in conversation with the author, June 2016.

lighthouse (fig. 4.32). In juxtaposition to the polluted city behind her, the lighthouse sits alone on a small grassy island in the unending water that takes up the rest of the panel. The caption below reads: “Der grosse moderne Mann hat Macht” [“The grand, modern man has power”]. With the lighthouse looming phallically in the distance, it is unclear if the lighthouse itself is the modern man, the individual occupying it or both. However, the double meaning of the adjective “gross,” which translates both to grand and large, could indicate that the tower itself is the object of H’s interest as well as the source of the power. By the fifth panel, this suspicion is confirmed.

Without having met the man residing within the lighthouse, H has already determined that she likes the man (“Der grand, modern Mann gefällt der Hure H.,” “The *Hure H* likes the grand, modern man”). Introducing herself to the building in the sixth panel, she announces that she would like to stay there (“Veilleicht bleibe ich hier;” “Maybe I’ll stay here”). As the beam of light from the lighthouse viewing station directs itself towards the viewer, we see not a light at its source but an eye. It gazes down upon H “astonished” [“erstaunt”], as if the tower itself had the capacity for shock.

Inspecting H high and low, the eye – and the panel’s frame – rest upon her ear, feet and finally, her vulva, which, hairless and childlike, H presents to both the searching spotlight and the reader over two frames. As the story pauses on H’s genital area (fig. 4.35), the captions narrate how the protagonist returns the lighthouse’s gaze: “Die Hure H blickt ihn an...Die Hure H blickt in besonders an” [“The Hure H looks at him...The Hure H looks particularly at him”]. As we focus in on her childlike sex, the two statements occupy the captions in the upper left corner of the frames. The reiteration of seeing in these two panels featuring H’s vulva establishes a connection between sex and seeing that

only retrospectively becomes apparent in the preceding imagery: the phallic structure of the lighthouse culminates with an eye that inspects through a beam of light. Conversely, H also “sees” with her sex organ.

As she stands with her garment pulled up to her belly button, the light cast by the lighthouse’s spotlight forms a second eye around her body, where her shadow becomes the pupil within which she stands (fig. 4.34). Reinforced by the following panel, which pans back to H’s face to present the viewer with an equally enlarged view of her eyes, this connection between sight and sex is cemented with her statement “obviously.” This word already themetizes sight in the sense of clarity but that is also largely an English association. The German original “selbstverständlich,” however, also carries with it a second meaning. While meaning “obviously” or “self-evident,” “selbstverständlich” is comprised of the words for “self” and “understandable” or “comprehensible.” “Selbstverständlich” therefore also carries with it a sense of knowing oneself.

This connection between sight, sex, and knowing – or in this case, power – has important consequences for Feuchtenberger’s reinterpretation of de Vries’s original text. Through the visual and textual relationships she develops between sex and power, Feuchtenberger presents sex *as* power. However, it is a form of power, as we shall see, only accessible to men.



Fig. 4.34: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

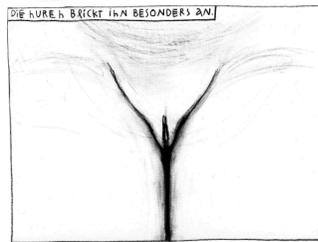


Fig. 4.35: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.



Fig. 4.36: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

With H's inspection complete, but without any confirmation from either than man within the lighthouse or the phallic structure observing her, H enters the tower. Once inside, she is greeted by an average-looking bald man in military costume. His outfit resembles *Wehrmacht* uniforms from the Second World War, but its identifying features are vague enough to reference military garb more generally. With the proclamation "Sie haben Macht" ["You have power"], H suggests that she stay with him (fig. 36, "Vielleicht bleibe ich hier;" "Maybe I'll stay here"). However, the man is unsure if he wants H to stay with him ("Vielleicht will ich das nicht;" "Maybe I don't want that"). H begins to climb the stairs as she states that that is a decision for tomorrow ("Entscheiden wir das morgen"). The man, who is now also described as "the grand, modern man" ("der grosse moderne Mann") agrees, as we watch H ascend the stairs from behind. The curvature of her figure, specifically her buttocks, is accentuated by shading to appear as if she has already removed her frock, foreshadowing the sexual relations alluded to later in the story.



Fig. 4.37: Feuchtenberger, "Leuchtturm," n.p.



Fig. 4.38: Feuchtenberger, "Leuchtturm," n.p.



Fig. 4.39: Feuchtenberger, "Leuchtturm," n.p.

Soon H becomes pregnant, and with child, she acquires her own power (fig. 4.37). H is no longer simply the *Hure H*; she, too, has become "gross" and "mächtig." Now also in control of the all-seeing eye of the lighthouse, the grand and powerful H grows to literally embody the second spatial meaning of both "grand" and its German equivalent "gross." H's body reaches mammoth proportions as she struggles to make her way

through the lighthouse door (fig. 4.38). However, also as a result of her pregnancy, the grand and powerful H faints. Importantly, the German word for fainting is “Ohnmacht,” which directly translates to “powerlessness” as a combination of the words “without power” (“ohne Macht”). Like similar gestures of literalization in *Mutterkuchen*, the protagonist’s fainting spell thereby renders H’s transition from powerful to powerless literal.

Lethargically, H lies down on the lighthouse island, her body spanning its length with her belly’s verticality mirrored in the phallic nature of the tower itself (fig. 4.39). Days pass – then weeks – as her belly grows. Until one day, H no longer feels faint and powerless. However, it seems to be a consequent of losing the creature inside of her. In a sequence representing the most bizarre delivery or miscarriage imaginable, it becomes clear that thing growing within her was not a fetus at all. Instead, an eel-like creature rips its way through H’s right breast. We see its beady eyes as it peers at us from the darkness that is H’s areola (fig. 4.40) before finally witnessing it tearing through the breast as it escapes H’s body (fig. 4.41) and jumps into the water (fig. 4.42).

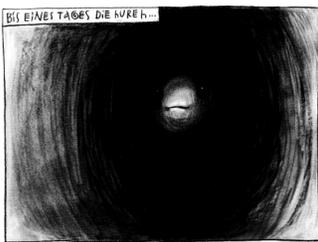


Fig. 4.40: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

Fig. 4.41: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

Fig. 4.42: Feuchtenberger, “Leuchtturm,” n.p.

The graphic narrative ends with H leaving the man and wading back through the water in the direction of the city. Her right breast continues to sag as the spotlight of the lighthouse follows her movement in the darkness. The story concludes with H

questioning if she is still free (“Bin ich noch frei. Denkt die Hure H;” “Am I still free. Thinks W the Whore.”), before considering whether or not freedom can even exist in the first place (“Oder gibt es das nicht;” “Or does that not even exist”).

* * *

Importantly, this pregnancy and the bizarre delivery or miscarriage are not evident in the text that accompanies the images. However, looking to the source text of this adaptation elicits clues to the interpretation of the action of the visual narrative. Turning to de Vries’s collection of stories, *Der Leib der Damen: Erzählungen*, which was published in 2004, three years before *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh* and one year after *Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen*, we can see how de Vries situates her figure of the *Hure H* in a context that does not profit from – or is even impacted by – Feuchtenberger’s rich illustrations.



Fig. 4.43: Katrin de Vries, *Der Leib der Damen* (Berlin: Schwartzkopff Buchwerke, 2004), cover.

The title story of *Der Leib der Damen* bares striking similarities to this first graphic narrative of *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh*. Moreover, the cover of the volume (fig. 4.43) features a panel from “Leuchtturm,” further reinforcing the connection between the story “Der Leib der Damen” and Feuchtenberger’s graphic narrative. Like in the comic, H is on a journey, her face is covered, she lives in a tower, and is in search of “Größe” (“grandness”) and “Mächtigkeit” (“power”). The context of these characteristics,

however, is vastly different. Ultimately, while elements of the narrative of “Leuchtturm” are borrowed from “Der Leib der Damen,” the fundamentals of the plot come from a different unpublished short story by de Vries, “Die Hure Ha und der moderne Mann.”

Over the two decades of their production, de Vries wrote twelve short stories on her figure the Hure H, not all of which were adapted by Feuchtenberger into comics. Looking at the collection as a whole, a more nuanced understanding of H and de Vries’s project emerges. De Vries’s unpublished collection of *Hure H* stories sheds light on the nuance of the *Hure H* character. Also working from these stories, it is apparent that Feuchtenberger’s graphic narratives profited from the styling and cadence of de Vries’s original texts, but Feuchtenberger also took many liberties in her translation of de Vries’s prose into comic form. While in some cases Feuchtenberger essentially transcribed de Vries’s text into speech balloons and captions, at other times she left out elements and dialog entirely, thereby curating a presentation of the text for her audience.

Feuchtenberger’s adaptation of the *Hure H* short stories thereby infuses them with entirely different meanings than de Vries’s original prose possesses, complicating the very idea that the *Hure H* series was a collaborative project. Instead, dominated by the imagery within the graphic narratives, Feuchtenberger’s *Hure H* series subverts, confines and restricts de Vries’s textual content to the goals of the visual material.

An important addition to this graphic narrative, beyond the visualization of the prose in general, is Feuchtenberger’s themetization of military power. “Leuchtturm” is not the only graphic narrative of the volume to incorporate allusions to German military history and, specifically, to World War II. The following story, “Kohlenhof,” also engages the military history of Germany by thematizing the fashion and *Trümmerfrauen*,

or rubble women, of the immediate postwar period. Feuchtenberger herself drew attention to the incorporation of war imagery in our interview, an aspect of the stories that she also asserts was not in de Vries's original texts.³¹⁵ So the question remains: how does Feuchtenberger put the *Hure H* series in dialog with the military history of Germany? And how does it change the message of de Vries's original prose?

“Leuchtturm” presents the reader with a male protagonist – the grand, modern man – dressed conspicuously in a military uniform. Here modernity is synonymous with military power, a critique that becomes more pronounced when I turn to Paglia's *Sexual Personae*. This aspect of the narrative is found in neither of the texts that inform its production; yet, it becomes an important element in Feuchtenberger's rendition and its subsequent analysis that fundamentally changes the tone, substance and message of the original texts. With this addition to the plot, Feuchtenberger turns de Vries's “Die Hure Ha und der moderne Man” into a comment on the culture of surveillance, while also echoing postwar debates on the origins, consequences and implications of the Second World War.

In Feuchtenberger's retelling of de Vries's short stories, H becomes pregnant, but not with the child of fellow traveller as in “Der Leib der Damen;” instead, the fetus is the macabre – and importantly phallic – embodiment of the grand, modern man's military prowess. Only after her belly begins to grow does H feel “gross” und “mächtig” herself. Initially, the reader assumes she acquires her strength from her role as mother – that her natural ability to produce life empowers her. However, when H becomes faint or powerless (“Bis eines Tagest die Grosse mächtige Hure H in Ohnmacht fällt;” “Until one day the grand, powerful W the Whore faints”) and then continues to grow into unnatural

³¹⁵ Feuchtenberger in conversation with the author, June 2016.

proportions, the reader is forced to question the implications of H's consummation with the military man. Then when H finally gives birth to the cause – and nominalization – of her “Ohnmacht” (“powerlessness”), an eel-like parasitic creature, the pregnancy is rendered a statement on the search for power (military and otherwise) and freedom through sex, or impossibility there of.

Through the strange – and entirely visual – culmination of events in “Leuchtturm,” the creature with which H was impregnated becomes the embodiment of both H's initial power and then “powerlessness”. Resembling an eel or parasitic worm, both phallic creatures, the power of “der grosse moderne Mann” is recast retrospectively. Reflected in the verticality of the lighthouse, it was the phallus that provided the man with his power, but that power was also an illusion and not accessible to women. While at first filled with power of grand, modern man through their copulation, H eventually succumbs to the consequences of acquiescing his masculine power: the relinquishment of freedom and the inevitable “Ohnmacht” or powerlessness that comes from that.

Ultimately, the visual imagery that Feuchtenberger develops to accompany de Vries's text renders “Leuchtturm” a criticism of masculine oppression, war mongering and phallic power. H's flirtation with military prowess results in the gestation of her own powerlessness. She acquires the illusion of power at the top of the lighthouse, where vision is likened to sexuality and she, too, controls its all-seeing eye, but the misapprehension of her own worth leads to her demise. With her body disfigured by its grotesque birth, H is finally freed of the burden of gestating this symbol of masculine aggression and leaves the grand, modern man. Only in her escape from the world of modern men does she find the possibility of freedom. However, since her flight leads her

back to civilization, another realm in which modern men dominate, she is forced to question whether or not freedom can even exist for her in the first place.

**Conclusion: “Bin ich noch frei... Oder gibt es das nicht”:
The Feminist Project of *W the Whore* and the Impossibility of Freedom**

Like *Mutterkuchen* before it, the *Hure H* series undermines conventional understandings of female sexuality in a profound way. It calls into question heteronormative ideals to deconstruct a series of hegemonic tropes of femininity: feminine desire manifesting as the desire to satisfy men, the idealization of the white dress and the perfect wedding, the perception of motherhood as innately feminine, the fetishization of the young, virgin body, the damsel in distress that needs to be saved, and, above all, the damning of female sexuality as whorishness. Feuchtenberger engages commonly occurring literary and rhetorical motifs and clichés characteristic in many forms of popular media to draw out a more nuanced understanding of female sexuality, one that emerges through the agency of the women themselves.

Feuchtenberger’s endeavor to undermine the stereotype of the whore figure and other tropes of womanness positions the *Hure H* project within a feminist context. The protagonist is on an existential search to rid herself of masculine oppression, but ascribing conventional notions of feminist activism to Feuchtenberger graphic narratives is insufficient in unpacking the politics of the project, as it diverges from more popular forms of feminism in some significant ways: sex is rendered an exchange of power, pregnancy is represented as monstrous, and there exists a latent criticism of female empowerment through sexual freedom. While the *Hure H* series concerns the protagonist’s search for independence and empowerment, the reader is surprised by the

ambivalence of that endeavor, as H continually fails to secure the freedom she seeks. Feuchtenberger's representation of female sexual experience, the role of agency or lack thereof, and the conflation of the whore and mother figures undermines conventional feminist notions of sexual promiscuity, subjectivity and motherhood. So where did this radical form of feminism come from? Looking to an important text in Feuchtenberger's feminist awakening after 1989, Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae* (1990), lends insight into understanding the ambivalence, power relations, aesthetics of ugliness, and recurrent theme of monstrous pregnancy in Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives.³¹⁶

Published in 1990 but not translated into German until 1994, Paglia's *Sexual Personae* is a polemic on western art and culture that has remained contentious to this day. In a pointed affront to feminist discourse, Paglia argues that gender is not a product of socialization but of biology and positions her work as a corrector to the understanding of the possibility of non-exploitative sex in contemporary culture.³¹⁷ Positing that "[s]ex is power," Paglia criticizes feminism for its perception of hierarchy as repressive and as a "social fiction."³¹⁸ She comments that feminists' assertion that "every negative about woman is a male lie designed to keep her in her place...has exceeded its proper mission of seeking political equality for woman and has ended by rejecting contingency, that is, human limitation by nature or fate."³¹⁹ Casting aside sexual freedom and sexual liberation as modern delusions, Paglia argues that hierarchy is the natural order and if we are to

³¹⁶ Feuchtenberger encountered Paglia's *Sexual Personae* after German unification, most likely through its German translation in 1994. She has since distanced herself from Paglia's project and ideas of women, gender and femininity, but she reported that it was very influential for her during the mid-1990s, Feuchtenberger in conversation with the author, June 2016.

³¹⁷ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1990), 3.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

“[s]weep one hierarchy away... another will take its place, perhaps less palatable than the first.”³²⁰

Paglia’s writing style is sensationalist, polemical and highly metaphorical. She adopts the characterizations of classical antiquity and Friedrich Nietzsche in categorizing the world into Apollonian and Dionysian or chthonian forces, where nature is feminine and chthonian, and civilization – along with the drive to master nature – is masculine and Apollonian. Identifying society as “an artificial construction, a defense against nature’s power,” Paglia’s book seeks to illustrate how “much in culture goes against our best wishes” by examining the fight against nature embodied by western art, civilization and popular media as it manifests in “sexual personae,” or in other words, stereotypes.³²¹

What is striking about Feuchtenberger’s *Hure H* series and its relationship to *Sexual Personae* is how it endeavors to produce a graphic narrativization of Paglia’s project. Feuchtenberger engages similar tropes and female stereotypes found in popular media, with the figures of the whore, the virgin, the mother and the old woman repeating themselves throughout the graphic narratives. Unlike Paglia’s text, however, which seeks to illustrate the prevalence of such sexual personae as evidence of man’s desire to master nature through his mastery of narratives about women, Feuchtenberger’s graphic narration undermines the substance of these stereotypes visually and literarily: the mother experiences her pregnancy as monstrous, her fetus as a parasite and birth as destructive; the virgin’s body resists fetishization; the whore refuses to pursue desiring and satisfying men; and the damsel in distress doesn’t need to be saved.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., 1-3.

Furthermore, like Paglia, Feuchtenberger's graphic narratives illustrate how sex *is* power, while both ascribing this type of power to the masculine gender and depicting woman's fundamental inability to access it. In "Leuchtturm," for example, the power of the male protagonist is decidedly phallic and embodied by military prowess. When H attempts to claim that same power for herself, she is rendered powerless as her body becomes the incubator for the perpetuation of masculine power instead of the embodiment of her own liberation. As Feuchtenberger shows, freedom is ultimately impossible for H as long as she continues to pursue it through sexual liberation, echoing Paglia's pronouncement, "[t]he search for freedom through sex is doomed to failure" (4). Throughout the three volumes, H is constantly in search of her self-determination. Often her quest for liberation is implied, but in the second and third volume, H begins to articulate her desire to be free. At times she feels like she's found it; at others, however, H questions the possibility of its very existence. Time and time again, H seems to look for her freedom in the wrong places.

In the first volume, she looks for it in sex, but H only discovers her self-assurance when she turns away from desiring men and embraces her own anatomy. H's search for liberation through heteronormative sexuality is immediately presented as an impossibility. The second and the third volume return to this idea. In volume two, H tries to find her freedom first in marriage and then in the land of dead men and lastly in the city. Only upon removing the dress, departing the land of dead men and leaving the city is freedom even a possibility. In the third and final volume of Feuchtenberger's *Hure H* series, H again seeks to secure power through her sexual exploration, but defeated through the gestation of her embodied powerlessness, she contemplates the very possibility of

freedom as she makes her way back towards the city under the watchful gaze of the lighthouse.

Again and again, mothers of the city, civilization and the trappings of heteronormativity figure importantly in H's consideration of her own liberation. Entering and leaving the city appear to be one of the primary determining factors in whether H is free or not. Like the monkeys in the cages of Feuchtenberger's self-authored final graphic narrative in the third volume of the *Hure H* series, H is trapped within civilization, a world defined by men. This final graphic narrative in fact positions H as one of the many animals represented in the story: inauthentically sexualized like the images of rabbits, dogs and fawns, whose portrayal forces the viewer to focus on their hind quarters (fig. 4.44), and paralleled with the caged monkeys, where its difficult to determine which figure is actually behind the bars (fig. 4.45). However, overseen by an unnamed female figure presented in a control room observing H, it is clear that Feuchtenberger, like Paglia, believes that woman are equally culpable in their own oppression. After all, H is also guilty of imprisoning the monkey, who the reader first perceives as a woman, within the primate museum or testing facility.



Fig. 4.44: Feuchtenberger, "Ball Saal," in *Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh* (Berlin: Reprodukt, 2007), n.p.

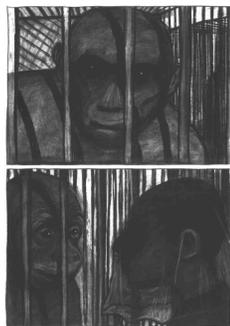


Fig. 4.45: Feuchtenberger, "Ball Saal," n.p.

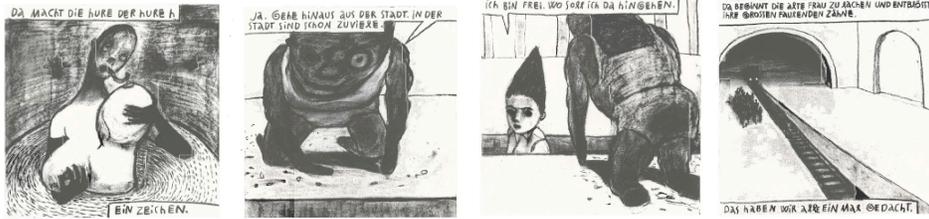


Fig. 4.46: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H ist frei,” 67.

Fig. 4.47: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H ist frei,” 69.

Fig. 4.48: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H ist frei,” 69.

Fig. 4.49: Feuchtenberger, “Die Hure H ist frei,” 70.

Returning to the second volume, the last story, “Die Hure H ist frei” [“W the Whore is Free”], cements Feuchtenberger’s condemnation of liberated sexuality and the impossibility of freedom. As H joins the men in the city observing the “whore” within shop windows, her oversized breasts dominating her legless torso, the whore on display makes a grotesque gesture (fig. 4.46). Retreating from the horror – perhaps at witnessing the embodiment of her mirror reflection – H returns to the handleless and footless old woman she first encountered when she entered the space (fig. 4.47). As she prepares to leave the city with a palpable sense of resignation (fig. 4.48), H states, “Ich bin frei,” but still wonders, “Wo soll ich da hingehen” [“I am free. Where should I go then.”]. In response, the woman simply begins to laugh (fig. 4.49), stating “Das haben wir alle ein Mal gedacht” [“That’s what we all thought at one point”]. Clearly, for the women in the city, there is no freedom. And according to Paglia, there is no freedom at all:

The modern pursuit of self-realization has not led to sexual happiness, because assertions of selfhood merely release the amoral chaos of libido. Freedom is the most overrated modern idea, originating in the Romantic rebellion against bourgeois society. But only *in* society can one *be* an individual. Nature is waiting at society’s gates to dissolve us in her chthonian bosom.³²²

³²² Ibid., 38-39.

Like the sexual personae of the whore, mother and virgin that Feuchtenberger deconstructs and complicates, freedom itself is rendered a myth by the conclusion of the *Hure H* series, continually sought after but never attained.

Both Feuchtenberger and Paglia's projects are about the intersection of power, sex and freedom. Feuchtenberger presents her reader with a representation of woman, sexuality and nature in chorus with Paglia's polemic, ultimately producing the type of art Paglia insists is missing – and perhaps impossible – in western society. Not only does Feuchtenberger deconstruct and complicate the sexual personae of the whore, the mother and the virgin, the series' focus on the power of sex and impossibility of freedom through sexual liberation is most clearly understood through the lens of Paglia's text. While Paglia's book attempts to illustrate, rather problematically, that all western culture manifested through sexual personae is an attempt to subvert the natural, the female and the chthonian, Feuchtenberger's adoption of the same politics seeks to present Paglia's polemic graphically and narratively. The *Hure H* series therefore exhibits the characteristic traits of Paglia's chthonian woman, femme fatale and monstrous mother in order to present H's story as the chthonian drama, which Paglia sets in opposition to the classical Greek tragedy.

The gravest challenge to our hopes and dreams is the messy biological business-as-usual that is going on within us and without us at every hour of the every day. Consciousness is a pitiful hostage of its flesh-envelope, whose surges, circuits, and secret murmurings it cannot stay or speed. This is the chthonian drama that has no climax but only an endless round, cycle upon cycle. Microcosm mirrors macrocosm. Free will is stillborn in the red cells of our body, for there is no free will in nature. Our choices come to us prepackaged and special delivery, molded by hands not our own.³²³

³²³ Ibid., 7.

Like Paglia's chthonian drama, the *Hure H* series has no climax but continues, seemingly without end, as the protagonist tries time and time again to rid herself of masculine oppression in search of her freedom. Yet, even by the end of the series, she has not found the freedom she so painstakingly sought.

Turning one last time to de Vries's collection of short stories, we see a slow transformation of H's name lends insight into both the meaning behind de Vries's protagonist and Feuchtenberger's adaptation of the series. In de Vries's original prose, the character who begins as the Hure H eventually becomes the Hure Ha. This first incarnation of the evolution of the character, which is also the only one apparent in de Vries's collection, is a visual marker for H's journey to find herself. Ultimately, as de Vries indicated in our correspondence, the Hure H would eventually become the Hure Hamina, thus rendering the series' journey of self-exploration complete. Finally named, the narrative arch culminates in the Hure H's true identity, which by way of the journey is shown not to be comprised of narrative tropes, clichés or stereotypes. H's subjectivity becomes her own and she can no longer be mistaken for the one dimensional Hure Hure.

In Feuchtenberger's adaptation, however, H does not seek to be named. As in her graphic narrative "No Roses" in *Mutterkuchen*, this decision could be traced to the Christian belief that God gave the creatures of the Garden of Eden to Adam to name. This move is therefore yet another gesture of resistance to masculine acts of authority and ownership. However, Feuchtenberger's refusal to name H can also be contextualized through Paglia's theory of sexual personae. She writes:

Name and person are part of the west's quest for form. The west insists on the discrete identify of objects. To name is to know; to know is to control...Walking in nature, we see, identify, name, *recognize*. This recognition is our apotropaion, that is, our warding off of fear. Recognition

is ritual cognition, a repetition-compulsion. We say that nature is beautiful. But this aesthetic judgment, which not all peoples have shared, is another defense formation, woefully inadequate for encompassing nature's totality. What is pretty in nature is confined to the thin skin of the globe upon which we huddle. Scratch that skin, and nature's daemonic ugliness will erupt. Our focus on the pretty is an Apollonian strategy. The leaves and flowers, the birds, the hills are a patchwork pattern by which we map the known. What the west represses in its view of nature is the chthonian, which means "of the earth"—but earth's bowels, not its surface.³²⁴

In Feuchtenberger's adaptation of de Vries' *Hure H* prose, not only does the protagonist remain unnamed and therefore unknown and uncontrolled, Feuchtenberger has embraced the daemonic ugliness of chthonian form. She has produced a figure not beholden to the aesthetic demands of the popular media. Her representation even resists the reader's desire to fetishize her: H's body transforms from flat-chested and angular in the first volume to mutilated or fully covered in volume third, resisting the gaze across the series by disgusting viewers or shutting them out.

As de Vries observes, "[n]amen sind schicksalshaft. Wir wählen sie nicht, sie werden uns zugeschrieben." In de Vries's original prose, H is on a journey to find freedom through her name and through her sexual liberation. In Feuchtenberger's adaptation, however, she turns Hure Hamina's trajectory on its head. Informed by Paglia's insistence on the impossibility of freedom through heteronormativity and sexual liberation, H is doomed to continue her search forever until she rids herself completely of masculine oppression and finds her self-determination outside of the walls of the city and the trappings of heteronormativity.

³²⁴ Ibid., 5.

CONCLUSION

The German Comic Avant-Garde and its Exhibition Past, Present and Future

As I have shown, something fundamentally changed about comics after 1989. In particular, the avant-garde comics of the 1990s no longer modeled themselves after mainstream American comic books; instead, through Anke Feuchtenberger, and to a similar extent Henning Wagenbreth and others members of PGH *Glühende Zukunft*, they found their inspiration in East German poster art, early German modernism and the expressionist visual language of American alternative comics, the politics of German unification and transnational discourses in feminism, inheriting the spirit of the East German avant-garde through their formal and textual hybridity, blurring of medium-specific boundaries and intertextuality. German comics thereby emerged as an art form in simultaneous conversation with East German art historical traditions and international practices in sequential art, adopting the legacy, politics and formal innovations of East German artistic practice and American alternative comics simultaneously.

Furthermore, Feuchtenberger's role as professor of drawing at the Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW, University of Applied Science) in Hamburg has extended her influence on German comics even decades after she helped form the avant-garde comics scene of the 1990s.³²⁵ Not only has she taught some of today's most promising graphic novelists since 1997; in 2002, Feuchtenberger assisted her students in

³²⁵ Wagenbreth has also worked as a professor of illustration and graphic design at the Universität der Künste in Berlin (University of Arts) in Berlin since 1994.

founding the comics magazine *Orang*, which published student content between 2002 and 2012, introducing many of Germany's most important graphic novelists today, including Sascha Hommer, Aisha Franz, Anna Haifisch, Arne Bellstorf, Marijpol, Sascha Hommer, Carolin Walch, and Line Hoven. While Feuchtenberger has become part of the establishment in some sense, her and her students' typically experimental graphic narrative still stands apart from mainstream comics production, and she continues to encourage and support the creation of avant-garde and independent graphic narrative both inside and outside of the classroom. To this end, she and her husband Stefano Ricci founded the independent publishing company MamiVerlag in 2007, which continues to introduce young, unknown and avant-garde comics artists to the international comics scene.

However, while museum and exhibition practice has readily acknowledged that traditional and avant-garde artistic practice has influenced the production of innovative – and interventional – graphic narrative, art history has overlooked this important aspect of postwar German art, and specifically its role in East German artistic practice after 1989. This dissertation therefore offers a corrective to art historical scholarship that has neglected to incorporate the ninth art, illustrating how avant-garde German comics inherited a variety of legacies of East German artistic practice, while also becoming an important mode of artistic production for East German graphic artists after 1989.

Turning to two exhibitions at the 17th International Comics Salon in Erlangen in 2014, it becomes clear how current exhibition practices in comics studies and comics fandom have begun to reflect this transition of comics from popular culture to fine art – while embodying both – in the German comics landscape. As Germany's largest and

most important comic convention that has taken place every two years since 1984, the International Comics Salon is the foremost comics event in German-speaking Europe.³²⁶ With a program that brings together mainstream and avant-garde comics through a combination of art exhibitions, events and commerce, the International Comics Salon is the “seismograph and motor of the German comics industry,” having reflected all facets of the medium over the last thirty years to about 25,000 biannual visitors.³²⁷

The 2014 Comics Salon, however, was unique, as it highlighted the work of East German comics artists in an unprecedented way. In addition to small exhibitions on East German monogatari comics artists Mawil (Markus Witzel) and Jens Harder, two exhibitions stood out in particular, Feuchtenberger’s “Lob des Kohlenstoffs” (fig. C.1) and East German graphic artist, Ranate-cofounder and teacher ATAK’s “White Trash Carnival” (fig. C.2). While other exhibitions featured what one would expect out of a comics exhibition – pages and panels at various stages of completion behind glass and in display cases – Feuchtenberger and ATAK’s exhibitions demonstrated how comic art and traditional forms of high art were no longer at odds.

³²⁶ The accompanying Max-und-Mortitz-Preis, which Feuchtenberger won in 2008 for Best German-speaking Comics Artist, commemorates the work of German-speaking comics artists across Europe.

³²⁷ “Festival,” *Internationaler Comics Salon Erlangen 2014*, last modified 2014, 2014.comic-salon.de/archiv_index14b51b.html?FsID=11&MesseID=1&SigID=1&spr=2.



Fig. C.1 (left): “Nacht über Bärmi und Klett” (*Mutterkuchen*, 1995, foreground) and “Leuchtturm” (*Die Hure H wirft den Handschuh*, 2007, background) in “Lob des Kohlenstoffs – Zeichnungen und Bildergeschichten von Anke Feuchtenberger” exhibition, *Kunstmuseum Erlangen*, June 15th-July 20th, 2014.

Fig. C.2 (center): *Das Haus* (2001) in “Lob des Kohlenstoffs – Zeichnungen und Bildergeschichten von Anke Feuchtenberger” exhibition, *Kunstmuseum Erlangen*, June 15th-July 20th, 2014.

Fig. C.3 (right): “Und immer und immer will die Hure H den Mann” (*Die Hure H zieht ihre Bahnen*, 2003) in “Lob des Kohlenstoffs – Zeichnungen und Bildergeschichten von Anke Feuchtenberger” exhibition, *Kunstmuseum Erlangen*, June 15th-July 20th, 2014.

Housed in the *Kunstmuseum Erlangen*, Feuchtenberger’s exhibition is immediately set apart from the other thirty exhibitions populating Erlangen, which took place in the lower levels of comic book stores, front windows of cafes, the town hall, the convention venue and various local businesses. Furthermore, the exhibition subtitle positioned Feuchtenberger differently: “Lob des Kohlenstoffs” (“Praising Carbon”) did not simply feature her comic art; it exhibited both “Zeichnungen *und* Bildgeschichten” [“drawings *and* picture-stories,” my translation and italicizes]. Emphasized in the International Comic Salon’s English translation of the exhibition subtitle, “Drawings and Comic Strips by Anke Feuchtenberger,” this exhibition united more traditional forms of artistic practice, typically perceived as “high” or “fine” art, with the comics medium, which had up until the emergence of Feuchtenberger and her colleagues been generally considered “low or popular culture” and “mass media” in Germany.

In both large- and small-scale, Feuchtenberger's charcoal and pencil-drawn panels hung around the spacious lower level of the Kunstmuseum Erlangen. It is not uncommon for comics artists to produce their panels at a larger scale than their printed versions, though Spiegelman's *Maus* is an important exception; however, some of the panels from Feuchtenberger's graphic narrative are dramatically larger than their printed counterparts, taking up large sections of the exhibition space's walls, such as the oversized charcoal images featured in *wehwehweh.superträne.de* (2007). Furthermore, with each image presented on a single page but still in chronological order, the reader's reception of the story was dramatically altered. While still sequential graphic narration, Feuchtenberger's handdrawn images from the panels of her published books were now hung on exhibition walls (i.e. *Das Haus*, 2001, fig. C.2), simultaneously signaling this material as both comic stories and works of fine art. By collapsing hierarchical distinctions altogether, Feuchtenberger's work bridged the divide between low and high categories of visual art fundamentally. "Lob des Kohlenstoffs" thereby demonstrated the way in which German art comics had begun to skirt the boundary between fine art and popular culture by ultimately demolishing it.



Fig. C4: ATAK, “White Trash Carnival,” *Ladengalerie Altstadtmarkt*, June 19th-22nd, 2014.

Similarly, the exhibition that featured ATAK’s “Comic-Poesie und Malerei” (“Comic Poetry and Paintings”) demonstrated the same collapsing of distinctions. Titled “White Trash Carnival,” the exhibition featured ATAK’s work in a variety of media from 1989 onwards – from his early contribution to the short-lived *Schokoriegel* series by Zyankrise, *Brain Love* (volume 4, 1994, fig. C.4) and the small-scale panels of his punk-rock protagonist from *King Kong und die NATO* (2001, fig. C.4) to his large-scale paintings and book illustration. Like Feuchtenberger’s drawing and picture-stories, ATAK’s seamless movement between media – mobilizing the delicate brushstrokes of his painting in his comics and the detailed Gary-Panter-esque punk-rock style of his panels in his painting – illustrated again how comic art and fine art met in the work of these graphic artists.

Yet, generally speaking it is only museum and exhibition practices in the German comics world that hang fine art and sequential art side-by-side. German art history, on the other hand, is slow to incorporate this important contribution to post-unification German

art. The traditional – and out-dated – dichotomies of low and high art still exert power in united German art history, where the comics and poster art of Feuchtenberger, Wagenbreth and ATAK are restricted to solo exhibitions or exhibitions on comics and posters but are not incorporated into larger conversations on German art.

Fortunately, however, the legacy of the East German avant-garde, politics of unification and its impact on the united German art scene has begun to emerge in other cultural and academic spheres, in large part due to my scholarship on the subject. This dissertation has not only begun the important work of introducing Feuchtenberger to the art history of united Germany, it proposes new ways of perceiving East German avant-garde artistic practice in post-unification German art. Through the formal and textual hybridity, blurring of medium-specific boundaries and intertextual artistic strategies of the East German avant-garde, Feuchteneberger brought unification politics, transnational discourses in feminism, international mobilizations of the aesthetics of expressionism, East German *Plakatkunst*, and the legacy of East German artistic traditions to German comics after 1989, contributing to the development of an artistically bold, experimental and highly influence comics avant-garde that emerged in dialog with the American alternative comics scene.



Fig. C.5: promotional material, “Vater und Sohn,” Galerie ICON, opened May 30th, 2014, Berlin.

Perhaps an important model for the future of united German exhibition practice and art history comes from an art show featuring yet another East German comics artist, Simon Schwartz. Born in 1982, Schwartz was part of the last generation of East Germans. In 2009, for the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, he published *drüben!* with avant-verlag. An autobiographical graphic novel, it was Schwartz's final project for his diploma from the HAW in Hamburg (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences), where he studied under Feuchtenberger, and recounted his parents' decision to leave East Germany in the 1980s. As one of three comics published on East German experience that year, *drüben!* marked the beginning of a trend in German graphic novels thematizing the East German past in comic form – a phenomenon that has since become its own genre.³²⁸

In 2014, Schwartz und his father, abstract painter Gert Schwartz (born 1956), held a joint exhibition at Galerie ICON at Veteranenstraße 22 in Berlin (fig. C.5). The title of the exhibition, *Vater und Sohn*, highlighted the relationship between the two artists, while also drawing their work into the history of German comics in general by referencing the most popular comic before World War II, *Vater und Sohn* (1934 to 1937) by e. o. Plauen (Erich Ohser, 1903-1944).

In an unprecedented fashion, Simon Schwartz's panels from his recent publication *Vita Obscura* (2014) hung next to his father's art informel. Gert Schwartz's simplistic and spontaneous gestural work and textured pages stood in stark contrast to his son's detailed and calculated panels, tight, grid-like page layouts, and smooth and professionally printed pages. The two media could not have appeared more different

³²⁸ This trend in German comics is the subject of my next project, "Panelled Pasts: East German History and Memory in the German Graphic Novel."

when displayed side by side; yet, their positioning also drew out some fascinating parallels.

In the context of father and son's emigration from the GDR, neither of their art forms would have been acceptable modes of artistic production in East Germany before 1989. Both therefore carry the air of dissident art, while at the same time embodying contemporary artistic practice. Furthermore, both artistic practices can be situated in terms of German history. While Simon Schwartz's comics thematize this history overtly in the content of his art, Gert Schwartz's painterly brushstrokes, use of negative space and texture as subject matter, and mobilization of balance and linearity as structuring elements recall the politics of postwar German painting itself. In the 1950s, when East German aesthetic policy advanced steadily towards Soviet-style socialist realism and figuration, West German art embraced art informel and abstraction. Gert Schwartz's painting therefore embodies the rejection of figuration and embrace of abstraction typical of East German dissident artists. The work of both father and son therefore represent two avenues of East German artistic production after German unification. Simon Schwartz actively engages the history of East Germany through the thematization of GDR political oppression and censorship in *drüben!*, while his father evacuates aesthetic, political and cultural references to the GDR all together.

In juxtaposition, these two art forms elicits fascinating parallels and deviations in terms of united German art history, but reducing the impact of these works to the way in which they engage – or disengage – the East German past is problematic. The positioning of typically “low” and “high” art sidebyside is already interventional enough to warrant attention. As among the first of its kind, the *Vater und Sohn* exhibition acknowledged the

changing status of comic art in united Germany, disregarding categories of production and reception as the defining characteristics for art worthy of display.



Fig. C.6: Feuchtenberger, “Plakat-Motiv 1 – 16. Int. Comic-Salon Erlangen 2014,” 2014.

Fig. C.7: ATAK, “Plakat-Motiv 2 – 16. Int. Comic-Salon Erlangen 2014,” 2014.

Fig. C.8: Mawil, “Plakat-Motiv 3 – 16. Int. Comic-Salon Erlangen 2014,” 2014.

To return to the International Comics Salon in Erlangen, as a testament to the importance of East Germans in the contemporary German-speaking comics scene, the 2014 Max and Moritz Prize-winner for Best German-speaking Comic at the International Comics Salon in Erlangen was *Kinderland* (2014) by monogatari member Mawil. And of the eight posters printed for the event, the first three of them were by East German artists: Mawil (fig. C.8), part of the last generation of East Germans and perhaps the most popular comics artists today; ATAK, illustrator and teacher, who was an 18-year-old punk when the Wall fell and he cofounded the Renate comics collective (fig. C.7); and Anke Feuchtenberger (fig. C.6). These posters illustrate a microcosm of the contemporary German-speaking comics scene, and based on the images represented upon them, East German artists play an essential role.

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