Revolting Families: Toxic Intimacy, Private Politics, and Literary Realisms in the German Sixties by Carrie Smith-Prei (review)

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justice emerge as important themes, and "everyday life became political" (289). In this context, letters became one medium through which writers internalized democratic processes and debated liberalizing society. The language, length, and style of letters began to change in the early 1970s based on the perceived reduction of distance between citizens and the government. Given that the author compares two complete decades with the early 1970s, a look at the late 1970s would have shown the progression of the political culture of writing across this turning point in postwar history and drawn a clearer picture of everyday political life. The concluding sections discuss how politicians are represented by themselves, the media, and the letter writers in contradictory roles and how letter writing enables the writers to challenge class and gender hierarchies or at least claim to do so. She closes with an evaluation of the present and future status of letter and petition writing as a form of political communication, emphasizing that despite the arrival of the digital age, letter writing continues to impact politics.

The book incorporates a wealth of secondary and archival sources as well as interviews with a more personal perspective that allows for supplementary interpretation of the other sources. The lived experiences of the letter-writing citizen or the letter-receiving politician are what set this research apart. Unfortunately, the book overall is made too lengthy by the fact that the author at times quotes too extensively from letters and petitions, reproduces illustrations of letters which are unfortunately not always readable due to inadequate reprinting, and is repetitive in her argumentation. Nonetheless, *Demokratie erschreiben* is a well-researched analysis of how citizens actively shape a democratic system through letter writing and will hopefully provide an impetus for further research on the political culture of letter and petition writing not just in Germany and not just from a historical point of view.

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Revolting Families: Toxic Intimacy, Private Politics, and Literary Realisms in the German Sixties. By Carrie Smith-Prei. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 204. Cloth $44.45. E-Book $42.23. ISBN 978-1442646377.

Carrie Smith-Prei's *Revolting Families: Toxic Intimacy, Private Politics, and Literary Realisms in the German Sixties* lays out a cogent, historicized, and theoretically grounded argument that "literary corporeal negativity" can engender sociopolitical resistance. The study insists that such representations impulse critique in readers by demonstrating the radically personal and public character of the body and by destabilizing the beauty-goodness axiom that dominated the West German imaginary (and that largely remains dominant today). To make the case for the persuasive force of literary corporeal negativity, Smith-Prei analyses several texts by four West German

authors: Dieter Wellershoff, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Gisela Elsner, and Renate Rasp. Her analysis contextualizes their aesthetics and themes in contemporary philosophical and social debates of the long 1960s while utilizing noncontemporaneous theory—notably that of Sianna Ngai, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault—to further illuminate the new realist and black realist texts of these then-emergent writers.

A solid portion of her meaty introduction carefully charts articulations of the slippery term realism to arrive at a working definition for her subsequent analysis. Here, Smith-Prei draws extensively from Dieter Wellershoff, who in his role as editor at Kiepenheuer and Witsch coined the term "new realism" in relation to Brinkmann's literary production. Writing of the texts in her investigation, Smith-Prei states, "beginning from the assumption that 1960s literary realism reflects or engages with the individual's everyday private experiences, these texts portray reality not mimetically, but instead sensually and emotionally, and thus as formulated and experienced by the body. This body includes textual bodies and the reader's body" (13). Drawing on the local term "new realism" as the basis of her analytic "blueprint," Smith-Prei notes that Wellershoff's moniker was not prescriptive, but rather descriptive of a collection of writing that focuses on details of the subjective and personal everyday. The variant of black realism employs more satire and hyperbolic ugliness and may produce unease in readers, inviting them to "resist normativity through refusal, as is the case with Elsner's novel, or passivity, in Rasp's text" (103). For Smith-Prei, new realist and black realist authors are simultaneously of their times and unique within them. These writing modes expanded within the milieu of political engagement that characterized 1960s social movements. For instance, from early in the decade, many social actors were rethinking what was understood as the private sphere under the multiply defined clarion call "the personal is political." In the 1970s, new subjectivity would intensify artistic inward turning. The works under study also resonate with traditions of negativity in West German philosophical and literary thought. At the same time, these fictions are distinct because they reject notions of the liberatory potential of physicality, sexuality, and affect as popularized by Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse.

Each of Smith-Prei's chosen texts depicts variously deformed private spheres engendered by the warped subjectivities of the protagonists. With greater or lesser explicitness, each work links these deformations to malformed public spheres as well. In Wellershoff's novel *Ein schöner Tag* (1966), physical symptoms such as paralysis and disturbing hallucinations exacerbate the dysfunctional relations between a father and son and their breadwinning daughter/sister. These symptoms and interpersonal practices are manifestations of repressed wartime trauma, particularly the death of their wife/mother. Here, the connections between corporeal negativity, fraught home lives, and the brutalities of social history are explicit. By contrast, Brinkmann's short story *In der Grube* (1962) depicts how protagonists who grew up stifled in bourgeois

homes experience physical rigidity and ultimately disgust relative to sexuality and desire. Smith-Prei argues that although Brinkmann's oeuvre is frequently considered politically disengaged, its aesthetics of detail and lack of programmatic affirmation offer readers shared authorship in the text and in their own lived realities, which the tales evoke. Rather than working directly from Brinkmann's fiction here, Smith-Prei astutely draws from a variety of sources to make her points, including Brinkmann's own essays and the reader reception theorist Wolfgang Iser, whose 1970s ideas about literary negativity also influenced Wellersdorf's concept of fiction as *Probehandeln* (the rehearsal of behavior), in which "new forms of behavior can be practiced without consequences" (Wellersdorf, quoted in Smith-Prei 16). In Gisela Elsner's Black Realist novel *Die Riesenzwerge* (1964), Smith-Prei demonstrates how institutional forces such as church and school liquidate the individual subjectivities of a community, all within a repulsive, violent, and protein-laden overconsumption of the 1950s Economic Miracle. Finally, the study unpacks Renate Rasp's *Ein ungeratener Sohn* (1970). In this grotesque satire, a father and his wife first attempt to discipline their son into becoming a tree. When the pair capitulates to the failure of the experiment, they shift positions within the same master-slave logic to subserviently mind their maimed, immobile son. This story of power, domination, and submission as expressions of familial love explicitly references Nazi practices and thought and in this way connects the private sphere directly to recent national history.

How is Smith-Prei's study of the sixties relevant from today's increasingly postdeconstruction, neo-Marxian, Occupy-inspired perspective? Perhaps chiefly in questions around inciting change, the aesthetics of the quotidian detail, and the tyranny of the exquisite. As Smith-Prei highlights as well, the political efficacy of each of these texts relies upon the "critical consciousness" of the reader. Herein the perennial rub: the genesis of such awareness. While Brinkmann's text may leave spaces for readers to fill, from whence might the stuff of authorship come without such awareness? Similarly, as Smith-Prei points out using theories of Ludger Classen, Adorno, and Georg Lukács, Rasp's reliance on satire means that the reader must recognize irony in her texts in order for their messages not to be taken at face value. Recent debates about Berlin School film aesthetics address how and whether the unspectacular, the detailed, and the slow engender resistance to hegemonic societal spectacle and all-encompassing consumerism. Do they perhaps enable navel-gazing as an end in itself? In this vein, and risking the theoretically dirty label "affirmative," I contend that a major contribution of these authors and Smith-Prei's study is precisely their reconsideration of "grammars of disgust" (Ngai) through the ugly, the repugnant, and the monstrous, on their own terms and as estrangements of seemingly perpetual dictatorships of beauty as goodness.

While no study can cover every base, I would have greeted engagement with East Germany. In part because of its subtitle mentioning "in the German Sixties," the

monograph risks normalizing West Germany and inadvertently contributing to what is a more widespread phenomenon of erasure of the German Democratic Republic. Smith-Prei's intelligent readings of many theorists significant for the decade illuminate the literary texts and their cultural milieu. I wondered though where Marx was in the discussion, especially on commodity fetishism. Taking 1968 as a caesura, while common, is limiting; to understand history as about shifts more than events can open up richer understandings, as indeed Smith-Prei's work does in a related sense thanks to her contextualization of literary analysis in governmental policy and social "structures of feeling" (Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* [2004]). Yet, in the final analysis, these beefs of mine have more to do with general tendencies in scholarship than with this strapping and timely contribution to knowledge.

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Orte für Amerika. Deutsch-Amerikanische Institute und Amerikahäuser in der Bundesrepublik seit den 1960er Jahren. By Reinhild Kreis. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2012. Pp. 428. Cloth €56.00. ISBN 978-3515100489

There was a time when the government of the United States financed orchestras, painters, musicians, and intellectuals to travel through Europe and teach, entertain, and at times provoke audiences between Frankfurt, Vienna, and Rome. It was only an episode in the generally antagonistic, often hostile dealings of American officials with the concept of a "state-sponsored culture," instigated by the Cold War competition with communism, and in full bloom only during the two decades after World War II. While the cultural arm of the State Department, the United States Information Agency (USIA), encountered constant sniping and interference by the Congress, the CIA, under much less public supervision, was able to reach beyond cultural representation toward ideological engagement with the European intelligntsia until 1967 when this sponsorship was shockingly revealed. All of these histories have been well researched in recent years, and studies by Volker Berghahn (*America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe*, 2001), Karl-Heinz Füssl (*Deutsch-amerikanischer Kulturaustausch im 20. Jahrhundert*, 2004), Thomas Klöckner (*Public Diplomacy: Auswärtige Informations- und Kulturpolitik der USA*, 1993), Frances Stonor Saunders (*The Cultural Cold War*, 2013), Nicholas J. Cull (*The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 2008), and others have shown the importance of the cultural dimension of the Cold War.

Much less has been done about the decline of this official cultural diplomacy, which began in the 1960s und gained momentum in the détente years after 1970 when German *Ostpolitik* (Eastern Policy) worked toward a rapprochement with countries of