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Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education

Polarisierende Deutungen von Gesellschaft
als Herausforderung für die Musikpädagogik

herausgegeben von
Carmen Heß und
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Voicing Outrage? Ignoring the Matter? Explaining the Problem!

A Model of Analysis for Engaging with Aesthetic References to National Socialism during Times of Emerging Far-Right Populism Using the Example of Rammstein's *Deutschland*

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1. Introduction

National Socialism has been a topic in popular culture for many decades. The examples from comics, film, and literature referencing National Socialism are now legion and range from satirical exaggerations with sometimes abstruse stories (e.g., Walter Moers' (1998) *Adolf* comics, Timur Vermes' (2012) novel *Er ist wieder da*, Timo Vuorensola's (2012) feature film *Iron Sky*) to attempts to fictionally present the theme of National Socialism in a supposedly "authentic" way (e.g., Oliver Hirschbiegel's (2004) feature film *Der Untergang*). In popular music, too, since the 1960s, artistic recourse to the symbolism and aesthetics of National Socialism has proven to be a subject often used and the list of popular musicians using references to National Socialism in their works is long. While in the 1970s such kinds of artistic recourse in music mainly took place in small, more or less self-contained scenes such as industrial music and were often not even noticed by the general public, the situation changed with the emergence of decidedly right-wing extremist music in the 1980s. While such recourse by bands from the spectrum of the extreme right are undoubtedly an expression of a reactionary, inhuman, and revisionist worldview representing their glorification of National Socialism, the situation is more complex with bands and musicians who are not part of the extreme right.

In popular music, the use of references to National Socialism can be described as problematic action that is bound to incite a significant number of responses, because of how it challenges social norms of acceptability. It goes without saying that these kinds of actions become even more inflammatory when they happen at the same time as widespread far-right populism. Moreover, reactions and responses to them tend to vary: some may voice outrage on social media platforms, while others may choose to ignore the matter or try to explain some of the problems that are caused or echoed when Nazi references are identified in cultural artefacts such as music videos. With artistic references to the Holocaust, however, things are still somewhat different: especially in Germany, where the topic is—apart from far-right populism and extremism—handled more sensitively than it is abroad due to our historical responsibility, references to the Holocaust usually trigger vehement (media) reactions. Of course, the more well-known a musician or band is, the more public attention such artistic references receive. And when a band such as Rammstein, which is by far the most internationally known band from Germany, refers to the Holocaust in their work, a wave of media outrage is inevitable. On March 27, 2019, Rammstein released a thirty-six-second trailer on *YouTube* showing four band members in the clothing of concentration camp prisoners, with nooses around their necks, in a setting accompanied by a somber soundscape (Specter Berlin, 2019a). By the time the actual video clip *Deutschland* (Specter Berlin, 2019b) was released the following day, a media controversy had erupted without any comment being issued by the band (management). Rammstein deleted the teaser from their *YouTube* channel shortly after the release of the nine-and-

a-half minute video clip *Deutschland*, which preceded a new studio album that fans of the band had fervently hoped to see for more than a decade. The video clip still contained the sequence from the teaser but it was now framed by various other timelines that—sometimes superimposed anachronistically—engage with dark episodes from German and European history.

Challenges like Rammstein's video clip are key to academic discussions of cultural products that reference National Socialism. Since a) it is absolutely necessary to deal with such topics academically rather than to leave the discussion to ideological observers from both ends of the political spectrum, and b) such a discussion must be conducted on the basis of facts in order to counter simplification, especially in times of far-right populism, my article engages with the question of what an appropriate academic examination might look like[1]. I chose Rammstein for two reasons. First, the band has a wide reach (not least among young adults) because of its enormous popularity. And second, there is hardly any other (mainstream) rock band from Germany that is so controversial. Opinions about Rammstein are often carved in stone and could not be more contradictory: while some columnists (and scholars) have accused the band since the 1990s of serving (among other things) a right-wing clientele, observers from music journalism (and especially the metal scene) offer more benevolent interpretations. Rammstein clearly provokes polarizing viewpoints, which, however, are at odds with populist discourse. In this article I definitely do *not* want to deepen the existing gaps between different views on the band. On the contrary, I would like to suggest ways of dealing with controversial artists and their works in ways that are both scholarly and constructive. I will showcase a model developed as part of my PhD project for constructively engaging with artistic references to National Socialism in "media combinations" ("Medienkombinationen") (Rajewsky, 2002, p. 15) such as video-clips and recording media (e.g., LPs, CDs) (Kopanski, 2022a). This model is *not* intended to deal with artistic references made by musicians that explicitly take right-wing extremist positions or belong to the right-wing extremist scene, since in this case developing different readings is pointless and would at worst lead to a relativization of inhuman, anti-Semitic, and racist statements.

As a first step, I would like to present my analytical model as an approach to Rammstein's teaser and video clip. The model is based on Linda Hutcheon's (2005) *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, but was modified for the analysis of references to National Socialism in popular music. My approach specifically attempts to tie the model back to Rammstein's video clip, and to discourses and background information generally pertinent to the music subgenre known as Neue Deutsche Härte (NDH) and specifically to Rammstein. In a second step, I would like to introduce Rammstein's teaser and video clip *Deutschland*. Given the limited space of this article, I cannot carry out a complete analysis of the clip. Instead, I would like to briefly introduce the content of its auditive and visual levels and then, in a third step, trace how media discourse surrounding the release of the teaser and the video clip developed. As indicated by the title of this article, this discourse covers the aspects of "voicing outrage" and "ignoring the matter". Based on this reconstruction, I will then present different ways in which Rammstein's teaser and video clip can be read. Despite the fact that the prevailing opinion, especially on the teaser, is that it is a (tasteless) breach of taboo for advertising purposes, an alternative reading can be developed based on a more differentiated view of Rammstein. In a final step, I would like to suggest ways in which this analytical

[1] My thanks to Daniel Suer for help with the translation.

model can be used constructively in music education in order to avoid the automatism of "voicing outrage" and instead deal with—morally questionable—artistic references to National Socialism in popular culture.

Since my model of analysis aims for a holistic view on controversial phenomena and to develop different readings that can sometimes be at odds with the dominant reading, it is essential—as part of my model—to position myself vis-à-vis the subject of investigation (Kopanski, 2020; Kopanski, 2022a). My view on the topic is that while I used to consider myself a metal fan in the 1990s, today and for some time now, I am an informed outsider—not to mention that I never really liked Rammstein. By my personal moral standards, the teaser for Rammstein's video clip is highly problematic. However, according to my academic understanding, scholarship on popular music and culture is not about presenting one's own opinion but about conveying complex facts. That said, an *informed* outsider perspective is conducive to a less ideologically biased approach that, when applied to these thoroughly complex aesthetic products, more easily draws from various perspectives and generates contrasting or contradicting readings. Most importantly, my understanding of myself as someone who is politically left—in addition to my German perspective—instills a skeptical attitude towards any use of Nazi imagery, aesthetics, and/or ideology in popular music.

2. "Explaining the Problem"—A Theoretical Framework (But Not Only) for Engaging with Artistic Uses of National Socialism

The model I employ here for engaging with references to National Socialism in popular music was developed in my PhD project, where it is derived from five band-specific case studies, each representing one of several loosely connected genres that form what is today frequently called dark culture (and formerly known as the Gothic scene). In each study I analyzed the use of National Socialism in relation to auditive as well as visual aspects of specific songs, album artworks, and related video clips, with my starting point being the concept of irony that Canadian literary scholar Linda Hutcheon develops in her study *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (Hutcheon, 2005)[2].

Hutcheon (2005, pp. 11-12) argues that irony is not necessarily inherent in an utterance or artefact but only arises in a communicative process between the "ironist" and the "interpreter". The key points from Hutcheon's study with relevance for this article can be summarized as follows: (1) Contrary to the widespread understanding of irony, its effect is by no means connected or limited to comedy or humor. Rather, it emphasizes recognizing a statement as existing between what is "said" (in this case: Rammstein's references to National Socialism and the Holocaust in the video clip *Deutschland*) and what is "unsaid" (in this case: the different levels of meaning included in these references) (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 11). (2) There are different degrees of irony that may be construed positively or negatively depending on individual contexts (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 47). For my article, this suggests that, for example, someone who is not familiar with Rammstein may not recognize any irony in the band's use of National Socialism, or that they recognize irony but may rather construe it on a higher negative level, for example as "insulting," while a fan of Rammstein may construe it positively on a higher level as a "transgressive" and "subversive" act (also see

[2] Parts of this paragraph were taken from an article dealing with the use of National Socialism in the song "The Final Solution" by the Swedish power metal band Sabaton (see Kopanski, 2020); a detailed presentation of the model can be found in Kopanski (2022a).

Hutcheon, 2005, p. 47). (3) The way in which "interpreters" read an aesthetic product (and thus recognize irony or lack thereof) largely depends on the discursive communities to which they belong. Each "interpreter" is automatically a part of different "discursive communities" defined by sex, ethnicity, nationality, education, profession, hobbies, and so on (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 18). With respect to Rammstein, this point suggests that, on the one hand, a person who belongs to the discursive community of metal fans and is familiar with the codes of the subgenre Neue Deutsche Härte may possess some "scene-specific special knowledge" ("szenespezifische[s] 'Sonderwissen'") (Chaker, 2014, p. 82) allowing him/her to interpret Rammstein's use of the Holocaust as less problematic, inasmuch as he/she is aware of traits specific to the genre and of the "transgressive" quality that is often ascribed to metal (e.g., Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 27-49). On the other hand, a person who does not belong to the "discursive community" of metal fans and is thereby not familiar with metal codes may understand *Deutschland* as an irresponsible trivialization or even a glorification of Nazi crimes. Thus, there exists no "correct" reading but rather a plurality of different readings (see also Hall, 2004). One major problem arises from the fact that claims to irony are sometimes used as protective strategy (see Hutcheon, 2005, p. 50). When it comes to the use of Nazi references in popular music, the statement "The references are used ironically" seems to be widespread among musicians and fans who (supposedly) "know" the "correct" reading of their favorite band (see Kopanski, 2022a). (4) According to Hutcheon, irony always has a "victim" that suffers from irony, leading her to conclude that "irony's edge is often a cutting one" (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 15). Thus, while the usage of irony is apparent to some, to others the inability to view or understand something as ironic can result in them being somewhat offended (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 33). And of course, the artistic usage of the Holocaust can be regarded offensive in general and (5) last but not least, irony can be "present" in an aesthetic product, which means that it is intended by the "ironist" (Rammstein in this case), or "found" therein (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 12). Accordingly, it is quite possible to discover ironic refractions in the video clip *Deutschland* that were either not intended by the authors or to read the (possibly) intended ironic refractions in a way other than originally intended.

However, Hutcheon's irony theory required a modification to more accurately fit the needs of my study in relation to "discourses" since, from my perspective, it does not include the power discourse in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 2017), which is central to interpretative sovereignty around artistic uses of National Socialism (see figure 1). This addition was necessitated as even in instances where bands/musicians borrowing from National Socialist elements emphasize their "apolitical" stance (a rather widespread narrative), their work is often read in various discourses (be it academic, scenic, or public) as a politically reactionary statement. Such being the case, I included newspapers and periodicals from the entire political spectrum in order to take into account the varying aspects attributed to the bands included in my study.

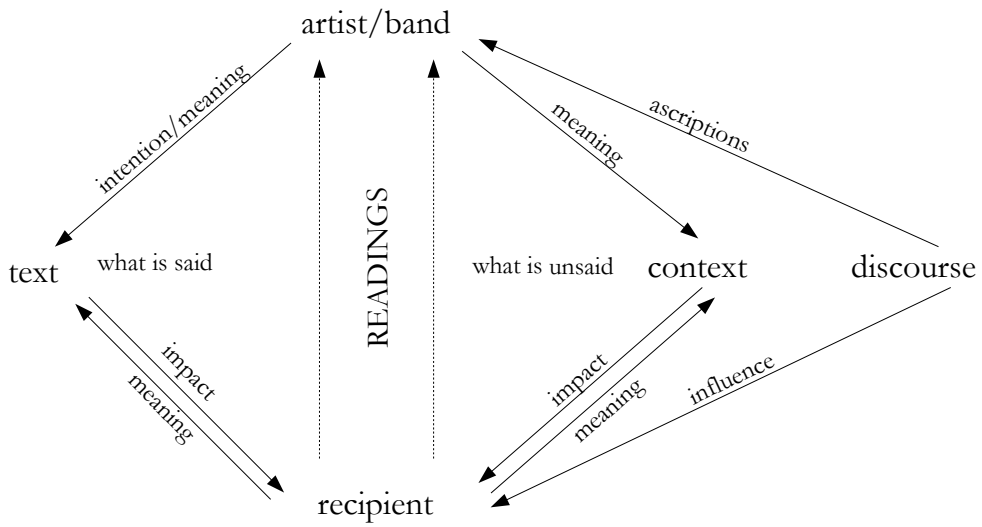

Fig. 1: Model, my graphic based on Hutcheon (2005)

Hutcheon's work was particularly useful as on the one hand it takes into account that a mere analysis of (multilayered) texts is insufficient to be able to explain a phenomenon in its entirety, while on the other hand it frames irony as multifaceted and as capable of being interpreted positively or negatively based on one's own background. With regards to how this model was applied, I chose an approach that, in addition to its focus on musicology, also draws from disciplines such as literary studies, history, political science, and media studies. Methodically, I decided to employ hermeneutic approaches on different levels: image hermeneutics (Müller-Doohn, 1997), video clip analysis (Rappe, 2010), music analysis (Tagg, 2013), and more.

To summarize the steps of my model, I initially draw from an extremely broad range of contextualizing perspectives so as to frame the genre from which the case study stems, ascriptions from different discourses, and so on. In a second step, I narrow the lens to present more specific information on the band and its self-staging practices; the guiding principle is not a full biographical summary but rather the detection of relevant points that can inform the different readings in later steps of the analysis. Examples here include the question of whether the band used National Socialism in previous works and of how the band frames themselves in interviews (a genre and band-image varying process) that helps to identify what Britta Sweers (2014, p. 107) refers to as "consolidated narratives" ("verfestigte Narrative"). Of course, such a selection—as well as the selection of journalistic sources—itself provides a certain framing of musicians and bands. It is therefore important to work as transparently as possible and not to take into account only those points that suggest a certain framing and support one's own view on a phenomenon. On the contrary, it can be very useful to also consider aspects that contradict one's own point of view in order to allow different, contradicting readings. The next step consists of an in-depth exemplary analysis of a specific artefact (song or video clip) that describes all aspects on the visual and auditive levels and takes into account lyrics, music, and visual aspects.

The order of these steps is not of paramount importance, yet they should all be carried out so as to generate a broad and solid basis for the final component of the model's application, namely the development of multiple readings. It is important to emphasize here that I refer to readings in plural not only because the model necessitates openness to competing readings but also because exploring one example in relation to contrasting discourses makes it difficult to present a singular

cohesive reading. The contested discourses also require that the analysis be conducted as unemotionally as possible (hard as it may seem at times) so as to ensure maximum intersubjective comprehensibility.

2.1 Text: The Video Clip *Deutschland*

On March 27, 2019, Rammstein released a thirty-six-second trailer on *YouTube*, showing four of its members in clothing worn by concentration camp prisoners with nooses around their necks, in a setting accompanied by a somber soundscape. The trailer ends with the Rammstein logo and the word "Deutschland" in a Fraktur font together with the date "March 28, 2019" in Roman numerals (Specter Berlin, 2019a). The teaser consists only of a single close-up shot in which a camera slowly moves (pan, tilt, and tracking) past four of the band's musicians. Paul Landers (guitarist) has a yellow badge on his chest in the form used to designate Jewish prisoners in Nazi concentration and extermination camps; Oliver Riedel (bass player) has a pink isosceles triangle on his chest, which was used to identify homosexual prisoners (Kogon, 2015, p. 72).

The actual video clip *Deutschland* (Specter Berlin, 2019b), which was released on the evening of March 28, contains the camera shot of the teaser (timecode [TC]: 8:08–8:38). However, there are additional parts to this sequence: at one point in the video clip, the victims embodied by the Rammstein musicians are executed on the gallows (TC: 3:58–4:15), while at another time the same victims shoot the Nazi thugs (TC: 5:29). In addition, further markings are visible on the chest of the other musicians: Till Lindemann (singer) wears a hexagon consisting of a red and a yellow triangle, which in the National Socialist identification system marked a Jewish political prisoner, while Christian "Flake" Lorenz (keyboard) only bears the red mark of a political prisoner (see Kogon, 2015, p. 71-72).

Because the video clip is almost nine and a half minutes long, it is impossible for the purposes of this article to analyze it in its entirety—i.e., shot-by-shot[3]. Therefore, I would like to settle for an overview. The video clip is an elaborately staged and visually stunning journey through European and German history showing the band, among other things, in the role of Roman legionnaires (figure 2), as medieval knights in a battle, as monks at a feast (probably in the eighteenth century) (figure 3), as prisoners and prison guards dressed in clothes of the Wilhelminian era, in a brutal boxing fight in the 1920s (figure 4), as GDR functionaries and generals (figure 5), as terrorists of the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) (figure 6), as SA men at a book burning, and also as inmates in a concentration camp and as their SS executioners (figure 7).

The musicians are accompanied by a black woman representing a personification of Germania (played by Ruby Commey) through the video's often anachronistically overlapping time layers, in which she is depicted as a radiant hero in golden armor (medieval times) (figure 8), as a broken woman in a wheelchair escorted by the band members (modern times) (figure 9), as an SS henchman (figure 10), and many more; she is burned during the SA book burning, eaten alive by the monks, taken hostage by RAF terrorists, and even gives birth to a litter of old German shepherds in a dystopian future while she is depicted as a saint with a halo around her head.

[3] A complete sequence listing of a video clip is essential in order to be able to systematically recognize, describe, and relate all of its settings.

Fig. 2: TC 0:55

Fig. 3: TC 1:57

Fig. 4: TC 2:54

Fig. 5: TC 2:35

Fig. 6: TC 4:30

Fig. 7: TC 4:03

Fig. 8: TC 5:36

Fig. 9: TC 7:04

Fig. 10: TC 4:00

Most of the spatial locations of the different storylines are not specified precisely. However, the sequence of the executions in the National Socialist concentration camp allows a precise location, since V2 rockets occasionally rise up in the background. This indicates that the clip is referencing the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp, as part of the V2 rockets were manufactured here (see Wagner, 2015). Furthermore, it is documented for this concentration camp that executions of prisoners were carried out by hanging in the presence of all prisoners as a deterrent (Wagner, 2015, p. 326).

On the auditive level the flood of pictures is accompanied by a three-way division. The video clip starts with a somber, electronic intro that can be heard for about a minute, underscoring the attack of the Roman legionnaires on the personified Germania. After this intro, the actual song "Deutschland" is played, while the end credits from TC 6:50 onward are underlaid with a piano version of Rammstein's song "Sun" ("Sonne") (*Mutter*, 2001)[4]. (My analysis, however, will be limited to the actual song "Deutschland".) In a typical Rammstein fashion, the song consists of quieter and more powerful passages that alternate in wave movements. In the case of "Deutschland" the verses are kept quieter and the tension builds up to the chorus. The instrumentation consists of the lineup of drums, bass, two guitars, vocals (plus backings), and various synthesizer sounds that is typical for the band. "Deutschland" is arranged in the typically "fat" Rammstein sound and includes Till Lindemann's characteristic singing style with a rolling R. Lindemann's pronunciation

[4] The version is quite similar to the one on the album *XXI – Klavier* (Rammstein, 2015), which contains piano versions of some Rammstein-songs. Besides a few minor changes it is particularly noticeable that the verses have been cut out for the video clip.

is stressed in almost every publication on Rammstein, be it in academic writings (e.g., El-Nawab, 2005, p. 178; Weinstein, 2008, p. 132; Jazo, 2017, p. 129), journalistic articles (e.g., Poschardt, 1999, p. 64; Speit, 2002, p. 18) or in newspapers (e.g., Köhler, 2001, p. 70; Hanske, 2009, p. 13) and is viewed as reminiscent of Hitler by some authors (e.g., Gless & Ross, 2001, p. 227; Lüdeke, 2016, p. 88, 116; Wilhelms, 2012, p. 251; Nye, 2013, p. 259). In my opinion, the association of a Nazi reference is not inevitably "present" considering Hutcheon (2005, p. 12), but rather "found", that is, it is not necessarily a recourse to Nazi functionaries intended by the artists[5]. However, to me the association seems to be based solely on the rolling of this consonant while completely ignoring aspects such as timbre and speech rhythm. Taking into account Victor Klemperer's (2015, p. 66) notes on Hitler's voice or Mladen Dolar's (2007, p. 162) description of the articulation of fascist politicians in general, the association does not hold up. An alternative view on Lindemann's articulation is offered by Robert G. H. Burns (2008, pp. 462-464), who recognizes a parallel between Lindemann's vocal performance and the cabaret of the 1920s and 1930s (also see Kahnke, 2013, p. 186)—an association that is quite common for uncontroversial musicians with a similar articulation of the r, such as Max Raabe.

While many of Rammstein's songs contain longer passages in which Lindemann oscillates between singing and talking, in the case of "Deutschland" the rhythmic talking is limited to the beginning of phrases of the verses. Apart from that, Lindemann's voice is located in the low registers, and in the chorus the word "Deutschland" is roared from polyphonic backings.

Regarding the readings to be developed, it is important, in order not to tear individual lines out of context, that is, to consider the lyrics in full, which is why I have decided to reproduce them in their entirety. They are as follows (given first in my own English translation and then in the original German):

You ([singular] you have, you have, you have, you have)
Have cried a lot (cried, cried, cried, cried)
Separated by the mind (separated, separated, separated, separated)
United by the heart (united, united, united, united)

We (we are, we are, we are, we are)
Have been together for a very long time ([plural] you are, you are, you are, you are)
Your [singular] breath is cold (so cold, so cold, so cold, so cold)
The heart ablaze (so hot, so hot, so hot, so hot)

You [singular] ([singular] you can, you can, you can, you can)
I (I know, I know, I know, I know)
We (we are, we are, we are, we are)
You [plural] ([plural] you remain, you remain, you remain, you remain)

[5] Rammstein's musicians offer various different explanations for the role of the consonant: for guitarist Paul Landers it is just a stylistic device typically used by the band (Großer, 2001, p. 26), whereas guitarist Richard Kruspe points to Lindemann's origin in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Richter, 1997, p. 31), and Lindemann himself justifies it with his deep, expressive singing style in which the roll happens "by itself" (Gless & Ross, 2001, p. 227). These different statements make clear that the musicians are not willing to provide clarity.

Germany—My burning heart/Wants [or: I want] to love and condemn you
Germany—Your breath is cold/So young and yet so old
Germany

I ([singular] you have, you have, you have, you have)
I never want to leave you (cried, cried, cried, cried)
One can love you ([singular] you love, you love, you love, you love)
And wants to hate you ([singular] you hate, you hate, you hate, you hate)

Arrogant, superior
Undertake, hand over
Surprise, invade
Germany, Germany above all

Germany—My burning heart/Wants [or: I want] to love and condemn you
Germany—Your breath is cold/So young and yet so old
Germany—Your love is a curse and a blessing
Germany—I can't give you my love
Germany

Germany

You—I—We—You [plural]

(You [singular]) Overpowering, superfluous
(I) Superhumans, weary
(We) Who rises high, will fall low
(You [plural]) Germany, Germany above all

Germany—Your burning heart/Wants [or: I want] to love and condemn you
Germany—My breath is cold/So young and yet so old
Germany—Your love is a curse and a blessing
Germany—I can't give you my love
Germany

Du (du hast, du hast, du hast, du hast)
Hast viel geweint (geweint, geweint, geweint, geweint)
Im Geist getrennt (getrennt, getrennt, getrennt, getrennt)
Im Herz vereint (vereint, vereint, vereint, vereint)

Wir (wir sind, wir sind, wir sind, wir sind)

Sind schon sehr lang zusammen (Ihr seid, Ihr seid, Ihr seid, Ihr seid)
Dein Atem kalt (so kalt, so kalt, so kalt, so kalt)
Das Herz in Flammen (so heiß, so heiß, so heiß, so heiß)

Du (Du kannst, Du kannst, Du kannst, Du kannst)
Ich (Ich weiß, ich weiß, ich weiß, ich weiß)
Wir (wir sind, wir sind, wir sind, wir sind)
Ihr (Ihr bleibt, Ihr bleibt, Ihr bleibt, Ihr bleibt)

Deutschland—mein Herz in Flammen/Will dich lieben und verdammen
Deutschland—dein Atem kalt/So jung und doch so alt
Deutschland

Ich (du hast, du hast, du hast, du hast)
Ich will Dich nie verlassen (geweint, geweint, geweint, geweint)
Man kann Dich lieben (Du liebst, Du liebst, Du liebst, Du liebst)
Und will Dich hassen (Du hasst, Du hasst, Du hasst, Du hasst)

Überheblich, überlegen
Übernehmen, übergeben
Überraschen, überfallen
Deutschland, Deutschland über allen

Deutschland—mein Herz in Flammen/Will dich lieben und verdammen
Deutschland—dein Atem kalt/So jung und doch so alt
Deutschland—Deine Liebe/Ist Fluch und Segen
Deutschland—Meine Liebe/Kann ich Dir nicht geben
Deutschland

Deutschland

Du—Ich—Wir—Ihr

(Du) Übermächtig, überflüssig
(Ich) Übermenschen, überdrüssig
(Wir) Wer hoch steigt der wird tief fallen
(Ihr) Deutschland, Deutschland über allen

Deutschland—Dein Herz in Flammen/Will dich lieben und verdammen
Deutschland—mein Atem kalt/So jung und doch so alt
Deutschland—Deine Liebe/Ist Fluch und Segen
Deutschland—Meine Liebe/Kann ich Dir nicht geben
Deutschland

(Specter Berlin, 2019b, transcription by R.K.)

On the linguistic level, it is noticeable that the lyrics contain a pronounced use of personalization ("I", "you", and the plural forms "we" and "you"). A lyrical I addresses a counterpart, who—as the chorus reveals—is a personified Germany. In the chorus a "Germany" ("Deutschland") screamed out of many throats is answered with lines such as "My burning heart/wants [or: I want] to love and condemn you" ("mein Herz in Flammen/Will Dich lieben und verdammen"), "Your love is a curse and a blessing" ("Deine Liebe ist Fluch und Segen"), and "I can't give you my love" ("Meine Liebe kann ich Dir nicht geben"). It seems that the lyrical I expresses an ambivalent relationship to Germany in the chorus. Rammstein makes use of alliterations in two sections of the song, with terms such as "Überheblich, überlegen", which can be translated as "arrogant, superior". These passages mainly contain negative attributes and—with reference to the title and chorus—allow a historical reading. The line "Surprise, invade" ("Überraschen, überfallen") and the following "Germany, Germany above all" ("Deutschland, Deutschland über allen") can, for example, be related to the beginning of World War II, which, as is well known, began with the National Socialist attack on Poland. This association is of course fostered by the modification of the first verse of the German national anthem "Song of the Germans" ("Lied der Deutschen")[6]. In addition, the (sung) lyrics are characterized by their openness, allowing for different interpretations. For example, the line "Superhumans, weary" ("Übermenschen, überdrüssig") can be interpreted both to mean that someone is weary of the "superhumans" and as ascribing this identity to specific individuals.

Altogether, the song and video clip pointedly sum up what makes Rammstein so special for many fans: elaborate productions, a bombastic sound, and lyrics saturated with ambiguity, all of which are combined with strong markers of "Germanness". The band does not shy away from using the Nazi era and this proves to be extremely polarizing.

2.2 Discourse: "Ignoring the Matter" and "Voicing Outrage"

By the time the full *Deutschland* clip was published on March 28, at 6 p.m., two different types of reactions could be observed. On the one hand, music magazines and webzines like *Rolling Stone* (2019), *Metal Hammer* (2019) and *metal.de* (Rothe, 2019) released short articles mentioning the Rammstein teaser and highlighting that fans would soon be able to listen to a new song by the band. This behavior of "ignoring the matter" can be said to be typical of larger music magazines on such occasions, not only in its reverberating effect towards the trailer but also in terms of many magazines more or less ignoring a potential critical or political substance. This is a phenomenon that I have observed in relation to many artistic references to National Socialism in various genres (Kopanski, 2020; Kopanski, 2022a).

On the other hand, German newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV stations were outraged. Initially, on March 27, the online version of the *Bild* newspaper—the largest tabloid in Germany—published an article in German with the headline "Can one utilize the Nazi era for PR? Rammstein

[6] The first two lines of the first verse are: "Germany, Germany above all/Above all in the world" ("Deutschland, Deutschland über alles/Über alles in der Welt"). Since the end of the Nazi era, the lyrics of the German national anthem have been reduced to the third verse of the "Song of the Germans", which starts "Unity and justice and freedom/For the German fatherland" ("Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit/Für das deutsche Vaterland"). As with Rammstein's lyrics and this lines from the German national anthem, all translations of German sources in this article are my own.

shocks with concentration camp video. Historians, politicians and Jewish associations react with indignation" (Bild.de, 2019). *Bild* embedded the teaser in their article—and the teaser is still available there (as of October 2021), whereas Rammstein deleted it from their *YouTube* channel when the video clip was released. The newspaper evidently showed the clip to various people and then printed their responses: Charlotte Knobloch, the former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, stated: "With this video the band has crossed a line. [...] The way Rammstein misuses the suffering and murder of millions for entertainment purposes is frivolous and repulsive" (Bild.de, 2019). The anti-Semitism commissioner of the federal government, Felix Klein, said the teaser was "a tasteless exploitation of artistic freedom" and that the band not only crossed a line but a "red line" (Bild.de, 2019). And the historian Michael Wolffsohn described the teaser as a "completely unacceptable form of desecration" (Bild.de, 2019), to take just three of the many statements expressing condemnation.

Until the actual video clip was released, the wave of outrage following Rammstein's trailer—and somewhat spearheaded by *Bild*'s own coverage—was picked up and continued by various German media: the conservative newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Witzeck & dpa, 2019), the left-liberal newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ.de, kir, luch & cag [initials], 2019), the liberal newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* (KNA, 2019), private TV stations like Sat 1 (2019) and n-tv (2019) reflected the controversy in their programs, and public cultural broadcasters such as Deutsche Welle (Baumann, 2019), Deutschlandfunk (Oppel, 2019), and WDR 3 (Hager, 2019) conversed with experts about their opinion on Rammstein's teaser. In addition to the question whether Rammstein had crossed a "red line"—which was generally agreed on affirmatively—it is noticeable that these media features quickly shifted to the question whether Rammstein was making common ground with the extreme right. In an interview with the German radio station WDR 3 shortly before the release of the actual video clip *Deutschland*, musicologist Yvonne Wasserloos stated: "What they [Rammstein] show …, of course, is something that provides opportunities or just so-called overtures ['Angebote'] for the extreme right wing" (Hager, 2019, TC: 1:24). Even before the official video-clip *Deutschland* was published, everyone was talking about the band—especially due to the German media, which made any further advertising by the band superfluous.

After the release of the video clip *Deutschland* on the evening of March 28, a shift in journalistic perception could be observed. The immediate outrage after the teaser resulted in attempts at a more differentiated view over the next few days. However, the rejection of Rammstein remained present and palpable—with few exceptions (e.g., Frank, 2019; Hornuff, 2019). One of the first in line was the music journalist Klaus Walter, who was interviewed by the German radio station Deutschlandfunk. Walter referred almost exclusively to the scenes of the Nazi era and described them as a "relativization" of the National Socialist crimes (Gerk, 2019, TC: 4:26). In addition, Walter denied that Rammstein was reflecting on what they were doing by continuing: "They [Rammstein] don't want to understand that, of course, they are playing into the hands of a right-wing mood in this country" (Gerk, 2019, TC: 5:23). In this assessment by Walter, the observation of a political situation is mixed with an assumption about how the music can be instrumentalized. Of course, there were other interpretations, too: in the online version of the German liberal newspaper *Die Zeit*, music journalist Jens Balzer wrote: "So many lonely, sexually frustrated men working on Germania: In the music video 'Deutschland', Rammstein refer to the longing for a collective identity" (Balzer, 2019). In this case, Rammstein's video clip is not viewed as an attempt to speak to the extreme right. Rather, the band is assumed to be (subliminally) nationalistic. There were also

attempts to abstract the problem of Rammstein's song. Felix Dachsel of the online lifestyle magazine *Vice* emphasized the ambivalence in Rammstein's *Deutschland*, which he feared would be lost at upcoming live concerts: "What remains is a stadium full of pot-bellied men in the glow of the blazing flames shouting 'Deutschland'" (Dachsel, 2019). What permeates these journalistic comments is the concern that Rammstein could (un)intendedly encourage nationalism. However, the question arises whether this concern is actually justified. After all, in the political right-wing spectrum, Rammstein was not celebrated for breaking the taboo of a (supposed) normalization in dealing with the Holocaust. On the contrary, a journalist of the right-wing newspaper *Junge Freiheit* wrote a comment in which his anger is palpable: "Nothing would be more wrong than to accuse Rammstein of German foolishness ['Deutschtümelei'], because they obviously are not able to deal with their own origins normally" (Graf, 2019). Regarding the suspicion that Rammstein is fishing for fans in different political camps, this reaction suggests that such a (supposed) strategy did not fully work in the case of the video clip *Deutschland* inasmuch as a commentator of *Junge Freiheit*, which always emphasized the ambiguities in Rammstein's work in the past (e.g., Wimbauer, 2001), was not amused.

The criticism that Rammstein serves a political right-wing clientele is not new. The core of the criticism is less an actual right-wing extremism accusation, but rather that NDH bands in general and Rammstein in particular contribute to changing the political climate. The German cultural critic Georg Seeßlen wrote back in 2002: "Rammstein plays with symbols and aesthetics of the extreme right in order to convey an 'ambiguous' appeal in the mainstream" (Seeßlen, 2002, p. 136; also see Lindke, 2002; Büsser, 2005). Although these allegations declined with the increase of their commercial success, such accusations recurred even in 2019, specifically following the release of the short teaser to the video clip *Deutschland*.

2.3 Context: Rammstein—Background Information and Self-Staging

Rather than recounting the band's entire history, which can be read in various publications from music journalism as well as from academia (e.g., Fuchs-Gamböck & Schatz, 2010; Lüdeke, 2016; Wicke, 2019; Kopanski, 2022b), I will focus on several pieces of information that strike me as potentially relevant for the development of specific readings. Rammstein's line-up has remained constant since its foundation in 1994. One aspect that seems important to me is that all members grew up in socialist East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, or GDR) and were active in bands within the East German punk scene (Kopanski, 2022a). That said, there were numerous state restrictions concerning music, artworks, and of course lyrics in the GDR. The second point concerns Rammstein's musical style, which is commonly referred to as Neue Deutsche Härte. The musical roots of Neue Deutsche Härte can be found in the musical styles of metal as well as in electronic body music (EBM), which itself emerged from industrial. Describing the complete origins and development of metal, industrial and EBM exceeds the scope of this article (see Kaul, 2017; Stiglegger, 2017; Kopanski, 2022a). Nevertheless, it seems important to me to point out that systematic artistic references to National Socialism in general and the Holocaust in particular are already made by the most prominent industrial pioneer Throbbing Gristle (see Ford, 1999, p. 8.15; Kopanski, 2022a). Thematically, it can be stated that there was apparently no self-restraint or moral limits for Throbbing Gristle: pornography, violence, murder and, of course, National Socialism found their way into their work unfiltered, so that it almost seems as if Aleister Crowley's dictum

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" provided Throbbing Gristle's motto. In retrospect, Throbbing Gristle is consistently assigned a well thought-out, enlightening, and in some cases even academic approach. A common explanation by many researchers and music journalists is that Throbbing Gristle wanted to show the power of the media with their work (e.g., Reynolds, 2007, p. 255; Kromhout, 2011, p. 26)[7].

Another important question when developing readings is whether a music group refers to National Socialism once or whether this happens repeatedly. In Rammstein's output, there is one occasion where references to the Nazi era are actually "present" without any doubt: the use of images from Leni Riefenstahl's pseudodocumentary *Olympia* (Riefenstahl, 1938) for the music video *Stripped* (Stölzl & Budelmann, 1998), which also caused controversy at the time (see Mühlmann, 1999a, pp. 26-35; Fuchs-Gamböck & Schatz, 2010, pp. 74-78, 101-106). In addition, there are various examples in which observers have "found" references to the Nazi era—whether they are actually intended or included cannot be discussed at this point (see Kopanski, 2022a). In the video clip *Links 2–3–4* (Bihać, 2001), some observers found references to Leni Riefenstahl. In this case, Riefenstahl's (1935) propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*) is mentioned as a reference point (e.g., Holtschoppen, 2004; Weinstein, 2008). What makes this allegation questionable is the fact that this video clip is an animation video in which ants play the main role (Kopanski, 2022a). In addition, there are isolated allegations of the use of Nazi references: the American journalist Claire Berlinski made a cross-reference to the SA slogan "Deutschland erwache" ("Germany awake") in Rammstein's song "Reise, Reise" (Berlinski, 2005, p. 68) and recognized the suffering of an Auschwitz inmate in Oliver Riedel's performance in the video clip *Mein Teil* (Berlinski, 2005, p. 76).

Regarding the self-staging of Rammstein's musicians, three tendencies emerge from the interviews with the musicians I have examined, all of which I consider to be of particular relevance for developing readings of their work. Firstly, the musicians frame Rammstein as a show act and strictly separate their private lives from their stage personas, which suggests that *Deutschland* is an expression of Rammstein's art and does not necessarily reflect the musicians' personal (political) opinions. Secondly, the musicians emphasize the momentum of provocation in their self-staging and associate it with their socialization in East Germany (the GDR). For the case study, this means that provocation is a possible but certainly not the only possible interpretation. And thirdly, in the context of self-staging, the stage personalities have distanced themselves from the political right on many occasions (see Kopanski, 2022a).

Looking at the teaser and video clip *Deutschland*, the statements made by the musicians in the first interview about the release of the untitled, seventh studio album in the music magazine *Metal Hammer* are revealing. Christoph Schneider (drums) stated:

> For me, the song is about the ambivalent emotional relationship to this country. People from my generation can understand that. … The music video is also something very special for me: a reminder not to forget what happened—but in the Rammstein way. A wall of emotional historical events that come together in one video clip. Like a teaser for a monumental film that one would like to watch afterwards. (Zahn, 2019, p. 20)

[7] Especially noticeable are assessments based on interview statements by Throbbing Gristle's Genesis P-Orridge (primarily from the *Industrial Culture Handbook* [Juno & Vale, 1983]—a fanzine), which have developed an enormous impact over the years and which are repeatedly found in a modified form (e.g., Richard, 1995, p. 137; Dittmann, 2002, p. 73; Stiglegger, 2017, p. 100).

Furthermore, Schneider answered the question whether the band had not worried that the song could be misinterpreted and misused by persons from the political far-right: "For me, the song is an attempt to describe the state in which our generation is. We live in a time in which many dare to trust opinions that are no longer only propagated at the regulars' table" (Zahn, 2019, p. 20-21). As I see it, this addition by Schneider expresses an implicit rejection of far-right (populist) positions. And guitarist Paul Landers added: "Our goal is for people who are as uptight as we are to shout out 'Deutschland' without feeling bad. It is very important that you can shout out 'Deutschland' once a year, at least at the Rammstein concert. The next day you can go back to work properly and be ashamed. *(laughs)*" (Zahn, 2019, p. 21). Like many other statements by Rammstein's musicians I examined, Landers' statement testifies to a certain lightheartedness in dealing with potentially intrusive topics.

2.4 Readings

Taking into account the band-related contexts as well as those regarding their public reception, how can the teaser and the complex artefact of the video clip *Deutschland* be read, especially in relation to its inclusion of references to National Socialism and related symbolism?

In a first reading, the short promo film can most likely be read as a provocation or a breaking of taboos for the purpose of generating maximum attention. In addition to the various (journalistic) attributions that suggest this reading, it can also be supported using a statement by the director Specter Berlin:

> I've known the game for a long time; you always have the vampire hunters who have to strike immediately. Anyone with a bit of intellect who has watched the teaser in which the boys are under the gallows knows that this is not going to be politically incorrect. But the moment of doubt before the music video came was only twenty-four hours long—so they all had to shoot fast because they knew it would be too late the next day. I think you can read it like this: Their job was to fall for the trigger. (Kessler, 2019, p. 23)

This is where Hutcheon's theory of irony is useful: despite the reading as a mere provocation, the conclusions can sometimes differ significantly. This is shown by the fact that Specter Berlin perceives a reference to the Holocaust as a "trigger", whereas journalistic discourse perceives it as tasteless. In contrast to the general journalistic view, the music journalist Thorsten Zahn (*Metal Hammer*) wrote: "Anyone who lets ten years pass between two albums and then sets the entire republic in turmoil with a thirty-five-second video trailer has probably done a lot of things right" (Zahn, 2019, p. 17). This means that the attributions can differ significantly depending on one's own background—mainstream journalism vs. a member of the metal scene in this case. For Zahn, due to his affiliation with the metal scene and its unwritten rules which he knows, there seems to be nothing reprehensible about Rammstein's teaser, whereas outsiders easily perceive the teaser as offensive. Of course, Zahn's point of view cannot be taken as representative of the metal scene. However, it is interesting that some observers perceive the same artistic expression as a despicable form of transgression that others celebrate as a legitimate form of transgression.

Again, the reading that posits *Deutschland* as a calculated provocation is possible but not without alternatives. Taking into account the roots of NDH and the socialization of Rammstein's musicians in the GDR, a second (and more sympathetic) reading could frame the teaser as media criticism.

By using the short sequence located in the concentration camp from the many possible images of the video clip for the teaser—knowing very well that they will trigger a medial outrage—the band uses the mechanisms of media outrage while simultaneously demonstrating their workings. That the latter reading of the teaser is not particularly widespread is primarily due to the critical (journalistic) attributions to Rammstein, which frame the use of Nazi references as publicity interests and as means to increase associated market gains due to record sales. In this respect the retrospective ascription of media criticism to early industrial bands such as Throbbing Gristle contrasts with comments on Rammstein's incorporation of NS elements in cultural artefacts.

With regard to the video clip, even more readings are possible. The video clip can be read as (1) trivialization and normalization of the German Nazi past as well as an opportunity for identification for the political right, (2) as a preliminary end point of what we might call "provocation as a business model", (3) as a critical examination of one's own relationship to Germany and nationalism, and (4) as an expression of the current Zeitgeist in dealing with German history. There are probably many other readings that—like the ones mentioned—partly overlap and partly exclude one another. For the purposes of this article, however, I would like to leave it at the four readings and necessarily limit the explanations to the most crucial points.

The first reading—Rammstein's *Deutschland* as a trivialization and normalization of the German Nazi past and as an opportunity for identification for the political right—is apparently widespread in the public sphere. And of course there are specific song lines and storylines in the video clip that support this reading. In addition, other works such as the video clip *Stripped*, now more than twenty years old, with the references to Riefenstahl can be included in this reading. In contrast, statements made by the band members in the interviews have to be ignored as protective claims or at least as implausible. I am not interested in dismissing a reading as "wrong". However, one can say about this reading that it is based on a selective analysis of Rammstein's *Deutschland*. By that I mean that on the one hand song lines that express an ambivalent relationship to Germany have to be ignored and the overall stance of the video clip must also be disregarded—after all, Germany is not portrayed positively in the video clip but as a country that is marked by suffering, violence, and death. On the other hand, in this reading the focus inevitably has to center in on those song lines and storylines of the video clip that support this interpretation. Problems arise in this first reading from the fact that the stage personas of Rammstein's musicians are sometimes equated with their private personalities. The music journalist Klaus Walter, for example, deliberately picks out the concentration camp sequence including the shooting of the SS men (along with Germania) and discovers that

> [I]f you want to interpret this sequence, that is relatively obvious. It means: "Well, aren't we all Nazis, but aren't we all victims too?" That means the perpetrators and victims are Rammstein and that is a clear relativization, along the lines of: in war everyone becomes guilty, the Russians also raped German women. So war is the father of all things and that's where crimes happen. (Gerk, 2019, TC: 4:13)

A differentiation of this first reading is that Rammstein deliberately and calculatedly fishes, so to speak, in different political camps. In fact, the openness of the lyrics ensures that people from both ends of the political spectrum (left wing as well as right wing) may feel addressed by some of the lyrics, which is a strategy that also relies on a selection of individual song lines. While a person from the political right may feel particularly addressed by the line "Germany, Germany above all"

("Deutschland, Deutschland über allen"), a person from the politically left spectrum will be more likely to identify with the line "Germany—I can't give you my love" ("Deutschland—meine Liebe kann ich Dir nicht geben"). The release of the teaser before the actual video clip can also be understood as an attempt to connect with a politically reactionary audience, whereas the actual video clip rather addresses a left-wing audience. As Melanie Schiller (2020, p. 263) points out, Rammstein uses irony "as reflexive nostalgia [that] challenges such notions of national identification, albeit willingly accepting the irony-inherent risk of ambivalence and of appropriation by the right". However, for such an appropriation, interview statements by the musicians have to be ignored. After all, there have been various statements since the late 1990s in which individual Rammstein musicians position themselves against the political right (see Mühlmann 1999b, p. 24; Gless & Ross, 2001, p. 228-229) and I was not able to discover a single interview in newspapers (e.g., *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) or in scene media (e.g., *Rock Hard*, *Metal Hammer*, *Sonic Seducer*, *Orkus*) in which one of the musicians positions himself in a reactionary, xenophobic, or in any other manner that would suggest a connection with the political right wing. Still, this concern seems to be widespread—especially in mainstream journalism. And in fact, regarding Rammstein fans, it might be interesting to see whether and to what extent people from the right-wing political spectrum feel addressed by Rammstein. However, this goes beyond the possibilities of my model and the scope of this article.

In a second reading *Deutschland* is seen as a preliminary end point of "provocation as a business model". This reading can also be supported by various observations and analyses: in principle, provocations accompany the entire history of the band. In general, other works such as a dead fetus for the cover artwork of the album *Mutter* (*Mother*), the album *Liebe ist für alle da* (*There is love for everyone*) (2009), which was temporarily included on a government index of works deemed harmful to minors, as well as various video clips and topics that Rammstein has addressed in songs can be cited—be it cannibalism ("Mein Teil", *Liebe ist für alle da*), incest ("Spiel mit mir", *Sehnsucht* 1997) or pornography ("Pussy", *Liebe ist für alle da*). The dispute with the German Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors (Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien), which temporarily put Rammstein's Album *Liebe ist für alle da* on its index, fits seamlessly into the band's recurring provocations (see Kopanski, 2022a, b). Furthermore, *Deutschland* was not the first instance in which Rammstein referred to National Socialism. With reference to the music video, various scenes lend themselves to this reading. On the visual level, these are, of course, the scenes in which the Rammstein musicians play inmates of a concentration camp sentenced to death and their executioners. Scenes in which the Rammstein musicians play SA men in a book burning further illustrate the point. Individual lines from the lyrics can also be used for this reading. Of course, this applies in particular to the line "Germany, Germany above all" ("Deutschland, Deutschland über allen"), which is clearly based on the first verse of the "Song of the Germans". As with the first reading, it is noticeable that this reading requires a selection of works by the band, as well as a selective choice of images and vocals from the video clip *Deutschland*.

The third reading—*Deutschland* as a critical questioning of one's own relationship to nationalism—includes a more benevolent approach to the video clip (and Rammstein) than those outlined above. Looking at the video and considering the entire range of images it includes, one will notice that it does not cover any "nice" events from German history. One will not find any visual references that depict Germany in a positive way, such as the "Wunder von Bern" (winning the football world championship in 1954, which was adapted in popular culture many times) or German

reunification. On the contrary, the video clip is not shaped by images of unity, but rather through never-ending depictions of (physical) violence and destruction. This violence is not glorified in any way but primarily relates to the darkest episodes in German history including National Socialism and the Holocaust. This is reflected in the lyrics, in which the lyrical I expresses an ambivalent relationship to Germany. This reading can be underpinned by the statement of Rammstein's drummer Schneider, who apparently wants the song and video clip read that way (see Zahn, 2019). With respect to the lyrics, this reading can lead to an overemphasis on those song lines that (supposedly) underpin this critical relationship to Germany. Another criticism of this reading is that it all too easily becomes an apology. The entire video clip *Deutschland* can easily be viewed as a clear, political statement by the musicians. This phenomenon can also be observed regarding other works of Rammstein. For example, following its release, the song and video clip *Links 2 3 4* was used by apologists as supposed evidence of a politically left-wing stance on the part of the musicians (e.g., Fuchs-Gamböck & Schatz, 2010, p. 84). Of course, with this reading, the (dominant) journalistic ascriptions have to be ignored.

In a fourth reading, *Deutschland* can be read as an expression of the current Zeitgeist in dealing with German history. Here, the video clip is a complex system of inter- and transmedial references that is at the same time highly self-referential. When considering Rammstein's "oeuvre", cross-references to many music videos (e.g., "Mein Teil", "Rosenrot", "Ich will", "Engel", "Sonne", "Amerika") and the album artwork of *Liebe ist für alle da* can be identified. On the linguistic level there are references to older songs (e.g., "Du hast", "Mein Herz brennt") and finally one of the shots of the clip (Germania with wings of steel emanating rays of fire, TC: 6:24) can generally be used as an allusion to the live performances of the band in which Lindemann usually wears these steel wings for the song "Engel". In addition, Rammstein uses traumatic images such as that of the burning zeppelin Hindenburg. During the execution scenes, the National Socialist V2 rockets are clearly recognizable, and a bust of Karl Marx with a tank and marching policemen, which can be read as a reference to the East German uprising in 1953, is apparent as well as references to riots evoking pictures of the left-wing punk gathering Chaos Days during the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, the references to National Socialism become an arbitrarily exchangeable source that is referenced the same way as historically less troubled periods of time. At this point we can go back to the first reading, so that the popular cultural reference to National Socialism can potentially lead to normalization.

This multitude of potential readings not only characterizes Rammstein's video clip *Deutschland* but can also be transferred to other works by the band, such as *Links 2 3 4* (Kopanski, 2022a). To avoid assumptions or overreliance on singular analyses, the band's other videos would need to be subjected to detailed analyses to more fully support my claim.

3. Conclusion and New Perspectives

The analysis of artefacts using the model proposed in this article can provide an alternative that moves past the (in my opinion) tiresome discussions as to what political "mindset" bands or artists draw from when using Nazi references in their work. Instead, a model that incorporates a holistic view on a specific artefact, the surrounding contexts and discourses, and the unbiased development of different, sometimes contradicting readings offers a differentiated view of artistic expressions,

which can subsequently open up new approaches for discussion. This approach may be more time consuming but unlike the ideologically influenced works that permeate academic discussions on such topics, it focuses on explaining complex phenomena in a differentiated manner that does not assume the existence of a singular "correct" meaning. In a time of far-right populism, in which academia is (unfortunately) sometimes perceived as part of a "corrupt elite" and decoupled from "the people" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019) such a factual, totally transparent and nonjudgmental approach can provide the basis for discussing controversial artists and their works. At the same time, this means having to endure readings that contradict one's point of view. Offering different readings does not mean neglecting one's own critical attitude, values, or moral standards—even if that means that the personal "threshold of the bearable" (Kopanski, 2022a) is sometimes stretched to the limit.

I do not want to conceal the model's limits: personally, I would definitely not use it with decidedly right-wing extremist bands or musicians. Apart from that, the model provides an approach for a critical and self-reflective perspective on one's own research and on contested discourses; this approach can easily be transferred to other controversial topics as well. At the same time, such an approach fosters knowledge about the Nazi era in such a way that nonacademic audiences can also be reached. As I understand academia, dealing with and explaining or conveying complex issues is an essential task in academic communication. The model seems to me to be a useful tool for comparing artistic references to National Socialism while always applying the same standards—even in cases which, according to dominant ascriptions, make (supposedly) enlightening use of Nazi references, such as those found in early industrial music. That way artistic uses of Nazi references that are widely accepted in the discourse are also questioned critically.

As a new perspective, this approach also results in potential for political education and music education. Songs and video clips like Rammstein's *Deutschland* open up a multitude of points of contact for talking to young adults about the Nazi era, which can be worked out in in-depth analyses—probably in cooperation with history lessons. In addition, such songs and video clips can be used as a starting point to talk about genres of popular music—in this case Neue Deutsche Härte. In addition, Rammstein's *Deutschland* can be used as a gateway to talk about artistic responsibility, ethics, and morals in popular music. Finally, a foundation can be established to allow young adults to critically deal with such uses of the Nazi era in the future, by forming a differentiated opinion and possibly even articulating a critical opinion on such references—beyond hasty automatic expressions of outrage.

As a look at the academic literature reveals, some scholars in German studies working in the English-speaking world have for years considered the possibility of using Rammstein's lyrics to teach German. Overall, the studies conclude Rammstein's lyrics can be productively used in this way (Lornsen, 2007; Lüke, 2008; Kahnke & Stehle, 2011). Why shouldn't a video clip like Rammstein's *Deutschland* also be critically discussed in music lessons for young adults in German schools?

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