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## **UT PICTURA POESIS: GERMAN POETRY AND PAINTING FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper deals with German art and poetry from the 1960s into the 1990s. After the trauma of WWII, Germany has been enjoying a vigorous rejuvenation of the arts, especially poetry and paintings. The paper, therefore, examines the new works of art produced after the war into the nineties to discern how traditional aesthetic values were re-interpreted and if new ones developed. The poems and paintings are discussed and refracted through the prism of the sister arts to discern how they captured the German character and consciousness since the World War.

**Keywords:** Germany, Poetry, Painting, Aesthetics

### **INTRODUCTION**

Germany, after 1933, fell under the rule of a dictator, Adolf Hitler. He and his Nazi followers put a hold on the cultural development of the German people except for those in Switzerland. A ban was placed on artists who did not follow the Nazi concept of aesthetics. This truncation and curtailment of freedom of artists, as well as the horrors of the World War II that followed, left the creative arts in a traumatic state. As a result of the war, Germany was divided into east and west. In East Germany, suppression of the freedom of expression continued until reunification took place in November 1990. After the trauma of WWII, this region has been enjoying a vigorous rejuvenation of the arts, especially poetry and painting. With the new works of art that have been produced after the war into the nineties, traditional aesthetic values are being re-interpreted and new ones have developed.

Between 1945 and 1990, poems and paintings have been produced expressing socio-political conditions in the German-speaking world. The term German means the German-speaking countries of Europe, primarily Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and in other countries with much smaller numbers of German-speaking people. The focus of this paper is on Germany. Issues of German identity, the Nazi past, and the once divided nation, as well as interpersonal relationships are themes which painters and poets frequently used in their works. German artists and poets, in a bid to separate themselves from the recent German history and its manifestation embodied in Nazi cultural impositions and aftermath, developed new aesthetic values that best communicate conditions in which they live. By comparing and contrasting poems and paintings, one may arrive at an appreciation of their aesthetic value and cultural importance in post-war and contemporary Germany. English translations of German poems are provided by the author to make them more accessible.

Poetry and painting are forms of art that require aesthetic and intellectual activity using words, sound, and rhythm in poetry, and color and form in painting and drawing to arrive at artistic works, poems and paintings. Often, they deal with similar themes or are about the same subject matter and require a degree of synthesis in their structure and creation. In poetry, the use of synaesthesia, the intimate association of an image perceived by one of the senses with an image perceived by another, gives a poem a painterly character through verbal metaphors and images of color. The term "rhythm" applies basically to music, dance, and poetry; however, in painting the use of visual rhythm gives a painting a similar aesthetic character that verbal rhythm gives to a poem. The combination of intellectual and structural elements, the unity in works of art, thus, endows them with an aesthetic essence, meaning, and affinity.

Through the centuries, painting and poetry have been looked at as similar and as having common aesthetic qualities. While Plato wrote in *The Republic* “The poet is like a painter,” (Cornford, 323, 555) Horace wrote in *Ars poetica* “...Ut pictura poesis,” (Horace and Rudd x, 70 ,361; Barkan, 46) meaning “As a painting so a poem.” Simonides affirmed, “Painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture.” (Lattimore, 31) The multi-genius of the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, in defining the two arts posited:

Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting which is heard but not seen. These two arts (you may call them either poetry or painting) have here interchanged the senses by which they penetrate the intellect. (Dundas, 55)

Twentieth century artists have also looked at painting and poetry in the same light. The Italian artist, Valerio Adami stated, “I would like if they could use the words ‘prose’ and ‘poetry’ also in painting, and could define my works as painting in prose.” (Ashton 165) The French artist, André Masson, confirmed, “It was obvious that for Miró as for myself, poetry, in the broadest sense of the term, was of capital importance. Our ambition was to be painter-poets and in that we differed from our immediate predecessors.” (125) One could deduce from these statements that painting and poetry exist side by side, and interchange structural and aesthetic qualities and, therefore, possess an affinity.

German theorists, poets and artists have dealt with structural and aesthetic relationships between painting and poetry and offer intellectual cultural backdrop to the two arts produced in the Germans-speaking world. More importantly, they have a body of work from which one could distill a framework to examine German poetry and painting. In German literature, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in *Laokoon: Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* delineates the boundaries of painting and poetry. Lessing strongly criticizes the *ut pictura poesis* tradition which dates back to the Greeks as expressed by Horace’s famous phrase. The “as in painting, so in poetry” tradition through the centuries assumes that poetry and painting are “so closely connected that they always went . . . hand in hand, and that the poet never lost sight of the painter, nor the painter of the poet.” (Ronnfeldt 56) Lessing was concerned with the nature of the medium and its relation to the subject as to beauty and decorum. He differentiates the arts on their temporal and spatial bases. Poetry as a temporal art is the unfolding of a series of words in succession as against painting, which is a spatial art in which figures and colors coexist. Poetry, therefore, is most suitable for expressing temporal actions, while painting is most suitable for expressing static bodies. He argues that “words are arbitrary, conventional signs, and therefore not bound to a natural imitation of a like object as are the visual arts, which are based on natural signs.” (Alexej 61) *Laokoon* initiated a critical discussion and comparison between the “sister arts”, painting and poetry, and questions the *ut pictura poesis* concept. (Lessing)

Johann Gottfried Herder’s response to Lessing’s *Laokoon* in his *Kritische Wällder* takes on Lessing’s concept of the external nature of aesthetic signs. He argues that poetry may use successive signs but the energy (Kraft) which they have is more important than their sequentiality. (Abel 366) Herder’s deduction that poetry and painting are related as expressions of a unifying source, which he called energy, points to the theory that the arts are the expression of imagination, and therefore, “could be related through their efforts to portray the synthesizing power of imagination.” (367) Gisbert Kranz in *Das Bildgedicht in Europa* affirms that “Bildgedicht” or “icon poem” and “Figurengedicht” or “pattern poem” should be used in German as the exclusive designation of the areas of poems and pictures on the one hand, and poems as pictures on the other hand. (1-29) Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand in *From Ode to Anthem* also agree tracing the history of pictures and poems from ancient times to the twentieth century citing examples of concrete poetry. (3)

The Russian-born artist and theorist, who formed the German art movement, *Der Blaue Reiter*, Wassily Kandinsky’s statement in the *Journal des Poètes* entitled *Cahier du Journal des Poètes: mensuel de création et d’information poétiques* published in 1938 confirms the theory on synthesis of painting, poetry, and the other arts.

The poetic spirit! Poetry!

Each true painting is poetry.

For poetry is not made solely by use of words, but also colors, organized and composed; consequently, painting is a pictorial poetic creation . . .

The source of both languages is the same; they share the same root: intuition-soul.

Seen in this light, there is no difference at all between Painting-Poetry-Music-Dance-Architecture.

All art. (Kandinsky 833).

What are the structural elements of German poetry and painting, indeed all poetry and painting, that generate the argued parallels, differences and/or similarities? The essence of a work of art lies in the fact that it is created by an artist, an individual who has a particular cultural background and because it has the structural elements which are creatively, often against the norms, put together or synthesized, and can be appreciated by an observer. In poetry, a figure of speech is a term for the word usage which allows a meaning to be conveyed that words do not actually state in and of themselves. Some examples of figures of speech are simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, etc. Rhythm is also important in poetry. Paintings have a common goal which is the organization for visual effectiveness. Line, color, texture, value, volume, and perspective are the means used by painting to create visual effectiveness. A parallel to poetry lies in the use of visual imagery.

Works of art can be interpreted at several levels depending on the angle from which a single poem or painting is approached. In subject level, the faithfulness of the poem or the painting to things presented is the center of analysis. The work is, therefore, compared with things seen and experienced in nature or in the real world. The medium level of appreciation entails analysis of the material and technique used to arrive at the work. The elements level involves the evaluation of the basic features of the construction of the work. For example, in painting, it means the analysis of line color, value, volume, texture and perspective, while in poetry it entails figures of speech, imagery, rhythm, and form. Viewing them from these levels of interpretation, one may come to the realization that poems and paintings have more aesthetically in common than ordinarily assumed.

Perception and meaning depend on each other. The cognition of an image in a painting or in a poem requires the same thought process and the mental and emotional reactions are also the same. To understand, that is to grasp the meaning of a work of art is, therefore, essential for its interpretation. The meaning of many poems and paintings are conveyed through symbols. The poet uses symbols to say what is to be said without it being lengthy and thereby losing all the beauty of sound and rhythm. Symbols can take several forms as objects or as actions in both painting and poetry. Objects have been used as symbols from ancient times. Christianity, for instance, has furnished western art and poetry in particular with a wealth of symbols, such as the dove stands for peace and the serpent for evil. Abstract ideas, in both painting and poetry, are almost always expressed through symbols.

The single deduction one can make from theories is that aesthetic pleasure is the outcome of the awareness and appreciation of the factors that are elemental to these Sister Arts, painting and poetry. It may, therefore, be argued that both painting and poetry are abstract because poets and painters select from life some features or designs to create their works. Modern German and contemporary poetry and painting tend to lean more towards the abstract form, although the figurative and the semi-abstract forms are also very much present. Maria Rilke's poem, "I am a painting. Do not ask me to speak," sums up the interrelationship and the difference between poetry and painting:

Ich bin ein Bild

Verlangt nicht, dass ich rede. (Cheney 409)

## POEMS AND PAINTINGS WITH SIMILAR SUBJECT MATTER.

There are poems written and paintings made by different German artists and/or points that deal with the same theme expressing similar aesthetic value that generate the same meaning and reaction. *Hier und Dort*, a poem published in 1976 by Günter Wallraff and *Café Deutschland 1*, (fig. 1) a painting by Jorg Immendorff completed in 1977/78 from a series of paintings, fall in this category.

**Hier und Dort**

	Hier	und	dort
I	hier freiheit		II hier gleichheit
	dort knechtschaft		dort ausbeutung
	hier wohlstand		hier aufbau
	dort krieglüsternheit		dort kriegstreiber
	hier liebe		hier leben
	dort haß		dort tod
	dort satan		dort böse
	hier gott		hier gut
III	jenseits von hier	und	fernab von dort
		such ich mir	
		nen fetzen land	
		wo ich mich ansiedle	
		ohne feste begriffe (Hippe 58)	

**Here and There**

I	Here	and	there
II	here freedom		here equality
	there servitude		there exploitation
	here prosperity		here construction
	there belligerency		there war-monger
	here love		here life



**Figure 1.** *Café Deutschland I*, painting by Jorg Immendorff, 282cm x 320cm, 1977/78, Samlung Ludwig Neue Galerie, Aachen

there hate		there death
there satan		there evil
here god		here good
III beyond here	and	distant from there
	I search myself	
	in a piece of land	
	where I settle	
	without firm concept	(Author's Translation)

The theme of both poem and painting is the partition of Germany and Berlin, the capital of Germany. In the first and second stanzas of Wallraff's poem, the former West Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany is positioned against former East Germany, the German Democratic Republic. Immendorff does the same especially *Café Deutschland I* (fig.1). The flags of the two Germanys are placed opposite each other in the middle of the painting and two pillars on the left and right sides show the political orientation of each of the republics. He employs visual symbols, imagery, and allusion to effectively communicate the condition of the then divided Germany. One perceives the political orientation from the socialist system of the East indicated by the hammer and the capitalism of the West suggested by the men in sunglasses and by one pressing his thumb on the head of a small figure. An eagle carrying a sheet of paper in its beak, a skull under the wings, a symbol for bureaucracy, dominates and presides overall.

Wallraff uses repetition as well as verbal and visual symmetry to compare and to contrast conditions in the divided nation. The repetition of "hier" and "dort" in official language refers to the respective republics and it was used by each of the republics to emphasize the divisions. The comparison brings into focus the differences in living conditions in each of the republics:

hier wohlstand	hier aufbau
dort krieglüsternheit	dort kriegstreiber (Hippe 58)
(Translation)	
here prosperity	here construction
there belligerency	there war-monger

Immendorff visual imagery presented with pillars in *Café Deutschland I* also make the same statement. While the pillar on the left is cracked indicating decay, "zerfall", the one on the right is polished and serves also as a stool in a bar in which well-dressed persons are entertaining themselves indicating prosperity, "wohlstand." References are made to the still lingering Nazism in both works. In Immendorff's painting the swastika visually dominates the "capitalist" side of the café. In the top right corner, the "socialist" side, is the portrait of Brecht with a light. He questioned and was vehemently critical of Nazism. His drama pieces reflect the socialist anticipatory elements, and their didactic quality was supposed to express the social essence of life of the socialist workers below in the bar as socialist realism propagates. *Café Deutschland I* has social and political qualities which fall into the category of socialist realism similarly captured in the poem, for example, in the following comparison:

dort knechtschaft	dort ausbeutung
hier wohlstand	hier aufbau (Hippe 58)
(Translation)	
there servitude	there exploitation
here prosperity	here construction

However, both poem and painting go beyond the category because the individuality of the artists does not succumb to the political aspect of their works.

The third stanza has a visual balance that is very similar to the one in the painting. A figure thrusts his hand through a wall thus acting as a link between both sides, while the visual arrangement of the words does the same:

jenseits von hier	und	fernab von dort
	such ich mir	
	nen fetzen land	
	wo ich mich ansiedle	
	ohne feste begriffe (Hippe 59)	

(Translation)

beyond here

and

distant from there

]I search myself

in a piece of land

where I settle

without firm concept

Both works introduce a personal attitude towards the reality of a divided Germany.

Immendorff portrays himself with his hand breaking through the wall, which refers definitely to the Berlin Wall. The image of Immendorff's friend A. R. Penck, a painter-poet who moved from the East to the West, is reflected on a pillar highlighting the personal as well as German society's anguish over the division. The Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of the oneness of Germany, is shown behind the reflection of Penck indicating the pain of all Germans.

The third stanza of the poem, in addition to the visual balance, also draws a logical conclusion. "Ansiedlung," settling in one of the two Republics, is only possible when one does not cling to a hardline concept, a notion visually expressed with Immendorff's hand breaking through the wall and Penck's image, a personal testimony. The question arises as to whether this is utopic or realistic. Immendorff's painting and Wallraff's poem do not fall into the trap of illustration or political agitation because they express historical depth that gives a concrete political situation a personal stylized realism. The two works have aesthetic affinity because they use similar visual and verbal structural elements to create images and symbols that give rise to the same intellectual and aesthetic perception. Immendorff's own words confirm that:

If you do work that is honest and committed, then the notion of beauty overlaps with the notion of truth. So don't try to pull the blind over eyes with some phony harmony. Even though these notions are incredibly hackneyed we must try to get back to these simple ideas. (Neugröschel 24)

The poem, *Hier und Dort*, depends on a limited vocabulary to convey the image of a divided Germany and through this characteristic expands the interpretation to go beyond the German situation. The painting, *Café Deutschland I*, on the other hand is crowded with visual images that to a certain extent limit interpretation to precise images peculiar to contemporary Germany before reunification. The poem, on the other hand, allows for a greater range of imagination by the recipient. Both pieces by compensating for their limitations when compared and contrasted, therefore, complement each other in capturing the pain of partition. Both works objectify pleasure, looked at from within the pleasure theory framework, in that the individual who reads or looks at them would derive pleasure depending on his or her personal preference. Both pieces express social awareness and as art pieces are subordinate to politics and social conditions by focusing on the political and social situation of Germany before reunification.

Reunification in 1990 generated several art works. In the poem and painting entitled *zeitvermerke* (see fig. 2) which appeared in the collection of poems and paintings with the same title published in 1991, the poet Dieter Scholz and the painter Heribert Losert deal with tedious nature of the reunification and exhibit the strong aesthetic affinity that exists between painting and poetry. By working together in each of the artistic medium, they arrive at pieces that complement each other and thus create not only an aesthetic unity, but also symbolic unity emblematic of German reunification.

**"zeitvermerke****the marks of time**

komm näher

come closer

komm näher

come closer

öffne den harnisch

open the armor

leg die waffen beiseite

lay the weapons aside

laß dich berühren

let yourself be touched

vom atem

by the breath

auf dem die herzsaite schwingt

in which the heart strings vibrate

aber vergiß nicht die narben

but do not forget the scars

die wir uns geschlagen

which we ourselves inflicted

ohne diesen verlust

without this lost

fehlten den rädern die zacken

the wheels have no cogs

durch die sich das ganze

which keep the universe



schließlich bewegt  
komm näher"  
(*Passagen*: 34)

in motion  
come closer  
(Author's Translation)

The beckoning to open up ones heart and lay aside the weapons is interpreted in the painting by the two figures standing near each other. The opened door in the background

and the opened window in the foreground show hope which is expressed in the following words:

" komm näher  
öffne den harnisch  
leg die waffen beiseite

come closer  
open the armor  
lay the weapons aside  
let yourself be touched

laß dich berühren" (*Passage* 34)

A distance between the two figures indicates a reflective mood which in the poem is expressed by these words:

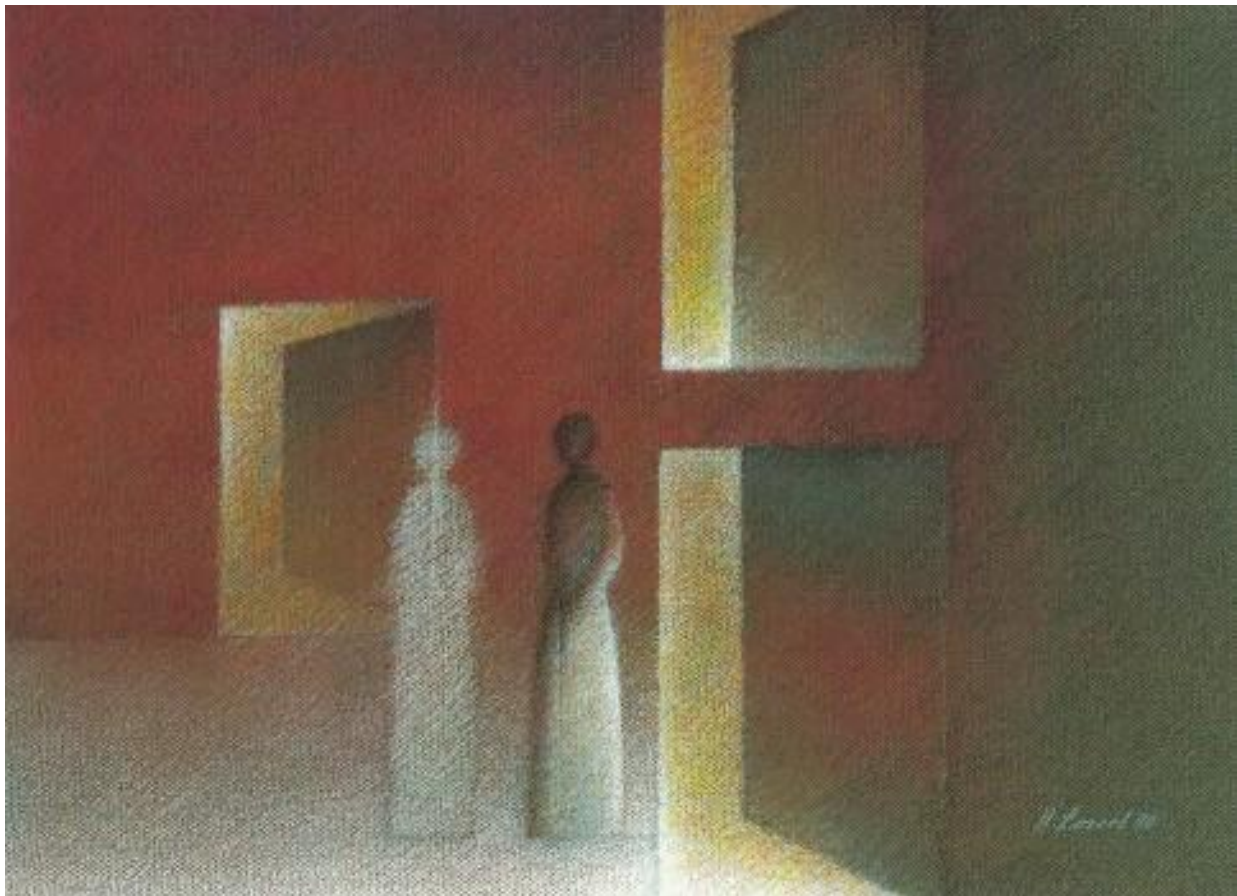
ohne diesen verlust  
fehlten den rädern die zacken  
durch die sich das ganze  
schließlich bewegt" (*Passagen* 34)

without this lost  
the wheels have no cogs  
which keep the universe  
in motion

The colors in the painting also create this pensive mood. The red and the green being opposites indicate the tension between the two characters and the yellow symbolically represents hatred and cowardice, although in the painting its relationship with the dark hues suggests the retention of its original symbolic meaning but paradoxically also indicating hope:

aber vergiß nicht die narben  
die wir uns geschlagen

but do not forget the scars  
which we ourselves inflicted



**Figure 2.** *zeitvermerke*, painting by Heribert Losert, 1991, from Vera Lebert-Hinze, "Begegnung mit zwei Künstlern und ihren Werken." *Passagen* 13 Quartal 3 (1991): 34.

Both artistic genres, painting and poetry, are autonomous by themselves but also complement and work into each other. The harmony between word and picture is perceptible through symbols, for example, the armor", den harnisch", and the scar, "den narben", in the poem and through the complementary colors and the figures one dark the other light in the painting. Visual and verbal metaphors in both genres also contribute to this harmony. For example, open the armor,"öffne den harnisch," in which the heart strings vibrate, "auf dem die herzsaite schwingt," but do not forget the scars "aber vergiß nicht die narben", and without this lost the wheels have no cogs, "ohne diesen verlust fehlten den rädern die zacken," in the poem is expressed in the painting through the compositional elements, such as the open door in the background and the open window in the foreground between which the two figures stand. This compositional unity is also dependent on the Golden Section or Golden Mean. A visual allusion recalling the Middle Ages in which armor was worn into battle that is expresses by "den harnisch" in the poem. The two genres are united through this allusion intellectually and aesthetically. Reference is made to the recent German past and the personal and national pain left in its wake and not to forget that past and scars from self-inflicted wounds:

"aber vergiß nicht die narben  
die wir uns geschlagen" (*Passagen* 34)  
(Translation)  
but do not forget the scars  
which we ourselves inflicted

F. C. Delius' *Hymne*, published in 1984, and Markus Lüpertz's *Schwarz-Rot-Gold-dithyrambisch* (see fig. 3), completed in 1974, are dealing with what is named the "German motif" that reflects Germany's past and recent past especially, which are still to some extent considered taboo. (Joachimides 65) Lüpertz painted a series of the *Schwarz-Rot-Gold-dithyrambisch* using steel helmets, officer's caps, anti-tank guns, spades, army equipment rusting and rotting away in cornfields, the Siegfried Line with its rows of concrete pyramid stumps, to capture visually the "German motif." (65)

<b>Hymne</b>	(translation)	<b>Hymn</b>
Ich habe Angst vor dir, Deutschland, Wort, den Vätern erfunden, nicht uns,		I am afraid of you, Germany Word, which was made for our fathers, not for us,
du mit der tödlichen Hoffnung, du im doppelt geschwärzten Sarg, Deutschland, was soll ich mit dir nichts, laß mich, geh, Deutschland, du steinigst uns wieder, auf der doppelten Zunge zerläufst du, auf beiden Schneiden des Schwerts ich habe Angst vor dir, Deutschland, ich bitte dich, geh, laß mir die Sprache und geh, du, zwischen den Zielen, verwest schon und noch nicht tot, stirb, Deutschland,		you with the deadly hope you in your double blackened coffin, Germany, what do I do with you nothing, leave me, go, Germany, you stone us again you dissolve on the forked tongue on both edges of the sword I am afraid of you, Germany, I beg you, go, leave me my language and go, you, between the goals already rotting but still not dead, die, Germany





**Figure 3. *Schwarz-Rot-Gold-dithyrambisch***, painting by Markus Lüpertz,

260cm x 200cm, 1974, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France.

ich bitte dich, laß uns und geh.

(Hippe 59-60)

I beg you, leave us and go.

(Author's Translation)

Delius in *Hymne* expresses a similar provocative mood towards the German motif as Lüpertz. The poem expresses fear, especially on the part of some among the younger generation, of the terms "Deutschland" and "deutsch". The use of the word "Schwert" (sword) is similar to Lüpertz's use of military paraphernalia, thus drawing on the myths and ideological clichés going as far back as Kaiser Barbarossa and to the present times with its moves towards reunification after the partition following WWII. The poem was written before reunification but even now after reunification the taboo motifs are still present.

The poem may be divided into three historical sections in which "Deutschland" (line 1) and "den Vätern" (line 2) deal with the distant past, while "tödliche Hoffnung" handles the Nazi period (line 3) and "doppelten Zungen" (line 5), "doppelt geschwärzten Sarg" (line 4), "verweste" (line 13), "nicht tote" (line 14) are set in the present and indicate fear as well as anxiety over the divided Germany. Nationalism is symbolized by the titles of both works. "Hymn", a national anthem, and "black-red-gold" the colors of the German national flag in the poem and in the painting, the title of the painting and the dominating colors, are very powerful nationalistic symbols. Both pieces allude to the past with its bloodshed and horror generated by nationalism. It is this nationalism that Delius and most in the younger generation are afraid of and fear might rise again.

In presenting the German motif and mastering it, which in the case of Lüpertz is an obsession, both he and Delius are consciously or unconsciously trying to exorcize it, “as one exorcizes a demon.” (Joachimides 65) Delius writes “Deutschland, was soll ich mit dir, nichts, laß mich, geh,” and by repeatedly asking to be left alone, “ich bitte dich, laß uns and geh,” the younger generation expresses its fear and anxiety. Delius alludes to the bloodshed and horror. The poem accepts the truth about ‘Deutschland’ mingling sadness with anger. Delius expresses fear, disapproval, and a wish to disassociate himself from the discomforting characteristics associated with ‘Deutschland.’ He expresses his feelings in a painfully personal manner.

Bertolt Brecht, a German poet and dramatist from an older generation, the world wars generation, also expresses fear, shame, and reproach from the point of view of a critic, unable to live with what his country had become. Brecht’s *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, in German, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*, and also known as *The Private Life of the Master Race* attests to his position. Seen from a historical perspective, German colonial power in Africa brings into focus a trajectory that culminated in the horrors of World Wars I and II. *Konzentrationslager*, concentration camp, was coined in German language and first used in South-West Africa, *Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, as a physical structure to house victims and remnants of German extermination of Hereros, Namas, and others who refused to vacate their land for German settlers in 1904 and 1905.

Like Brecht, Delius and Lüpertz are cognizant of history and the then evolving national phenomenon that was captured in eerie words of cold calculated intention, death, and destruction issued from General Adrian Dietrich Lothar von Trotha’s *Vernichtungsbefehl*, extermination proclamation, in the name of the German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Friedrich Wilhelm Viktor Albrecht von Preußen. (Puaux, 16). In 1933, Nazis named in Munich a street Von-Trotha Straße that was renamed Herero Straße in 2006 by the city government. (Bridgman 129) In 2007, descendants of Lothar von Trotha went to the central Namibian town of Omaruru and acknowledged and apologized for the gross human rights abuses in which their forefather was involved. (BBC 2007) Trotha’s descendants capture in real terms confronting history and an uncomfortable harsh reality, personal atonement, and reconciliation, *Versöhnung*. Delius expresses in a poem and Lüpertz in a painting artistic and aesthetic manifestation of a profound understanding of nationalism that had gone awry and the destruction it engendered and left in its wake.

Even in the twenty-first century, in March 2024, an accusation by Nicaragua of Germany aiding and abetting genocide by Israeli forces in Gaza through military and financial aid that was vehemently denied and rejected as having “no basis in fact and law” makes many Germans cringe and find it unbearable to be reminded of a past Delius and Lüpertz point to and want exorcised. (Corder, AP, 2024) *Kollektivschuld*, that is collective German guilt from the past, a recurrent issue thoroughly debated and discussed and captured in national consciousness as well as in texts and the fine arts as the struggle of overcoming or the work of coping with the past, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, manifests itself in Lüpertz’s painting in the same vein as Delius poem does not glorifying war and the battle motifs because he shows the objects of war as discarded and left to decay. “Time has passed over them; soon they will sink into the ground or disintegrate in some corner or other.” (Joachimides 65) A similar point of view is expressed by Delius’ words: “du, zwischen den Zeilen, verwest schon und noch nicht tot, stirb, Deutschland.” Both works developed a unified aesthetic quality by using the German motif with its complexity and wealth of associations.

The three paintings and three poems are expressing a well thought out analysis of the German identity and what it means to be German. Cognitive or intellectualistic theory framework reveals the quality of intellectual activity as well as the emotional intuitive knowledge that is inexpressible through concepts can be manifested in poems and paintings. Wallraff and Immendorf, Scholz and Losert, as well as Lüpertz and Delius are expressing what they see as creative individuals who perhaps have gained deeper insight and are disclosing a real cultural essence to others through their poems and paintings.

## WORKS OF PAINTER-POETS

Taking into account Johann Gottfried Herder’s position that the arts do not have to be related in their subject matter and should be looked at as coming from one source, it may be argued that to compare and contrast critically the aesthetic affinity in painting and poetry, one has to have a common basis from which to start; the most obvious one being how each of these arts handle the same subject matter. (Abel 367) Günter Grass’ *Gleisdreieck* justifies the reason to use the subject matter as a basis for examination.

Günter Grass in *Gleisdreieck* projects in drawings and poems published in 1960 the situation in the then divided Berlin, a source of crisis after the end of World War II. *Gleisdreieck*, (see fig. 4) the title poem and drawing in the collection of poems and drawings, uses the image of the Spider to represent the Gleisdreieck, a railway junction in Berlin. Grass emerged as a conscience of a country because of his intellectual, literary, artistic, and political activities and as a critic of post-World War German society, putting him at the center of a divided people, a divided country, struggling with and forging a new identity. He came of age by the end of World War II. At the age of seventeen, he was a draftee in “Waffen SS, the military branch of the notorious Nazi corps that played an important role in the Holocaust and other atrocities.” (Riding 2006)

Unlike Lüpertz and Delius, he was involved even though he was only six years old when Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1999 and for decades buried his personal past although throughout those long decades, for sixty years, he was a strident and an unrelenting voice explaining to the Swedish Academy: “There were extenuating circumstances, mountains of rubble and cadavers, fruit of the womb of German history. The more I shoveled, the more it grew. It simply could not be ignored.” (Riding) In his autobiography, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, (Grass) the English version entitled *Peeling the Onion*, he finally revealed his Waffen SS past. His critics called for him to give up the Nobel Prize, while others demanded he stopped being critical of Germans and Germany and to descend from his moral high horse. The German writer Walter Jens’ words encapsulate Grass’ personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* when he said that “it is very impressive and moving to see an old man finally coming to terms with his past.”

Grass did not relent in his criticism of Germans and Germany. In April 2012, some European newspapers published his poem “Was gesagt werden muss,” in English, “What Must Be Said,” inviting a flood of criticism, twelve years ahead of an accusation by Nicaragua of Germany aiding and abetting genocide by Israeli forces in Gaza through military and financial aid. (Corder, AP, 2024) In 2012, Grass was critical of the German federal government for selling a submarine capable of being armed with a nuclear arsenal to Israel and was apprehensive of it being deployed against Iran. (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 April 2012, *The Guardian*, 5 April 2012) Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel at that time and in that same position in April 2024, said:

“We don’t call for the annihilation of Iran and we don’t act for that purpose. We don’t call for the annihilation of the people of Lebanon or the people of Gaza, even though Israel is a very powerful country should it act in the way Grass ascribes to us. We don’t do that.” (*Welt*, 2012)

Coming to terms with the German past casts a long shadow and is ever-present in national life evidenced in 2024 because a younger generation is questioning and demonstrating against the sell of arms to Israel that they argued were being used to destroy Gaza and to kill Palestinians. And even though German reunification is a *fait accompli*, the nagging issue of the past and developments emanating from it captured in Grass’ *Gleisdreieck*, like a spider, weaves a web that ensnares German consciousness, but also simultaneously more like a bridge, presents new possibilities beyond that past. In the twenty-first century, *Gleisdreieck* may be reinterpreted as the web of the past and a wise spider, Germans and Grass himself, weaving the bridge to the present.

## Gleisdreieck

Die Putzfrau ziehen von Ost nach West.  
Nein Mann, bleib hier, was willst du drüben;  
komm rüber Mann, was willst du hier.  
Gleisdreieck, wo mit heißer Drüse  
die Spinne, die die Gleise legt,  
sich Wohnung nahm und Gleise legt.

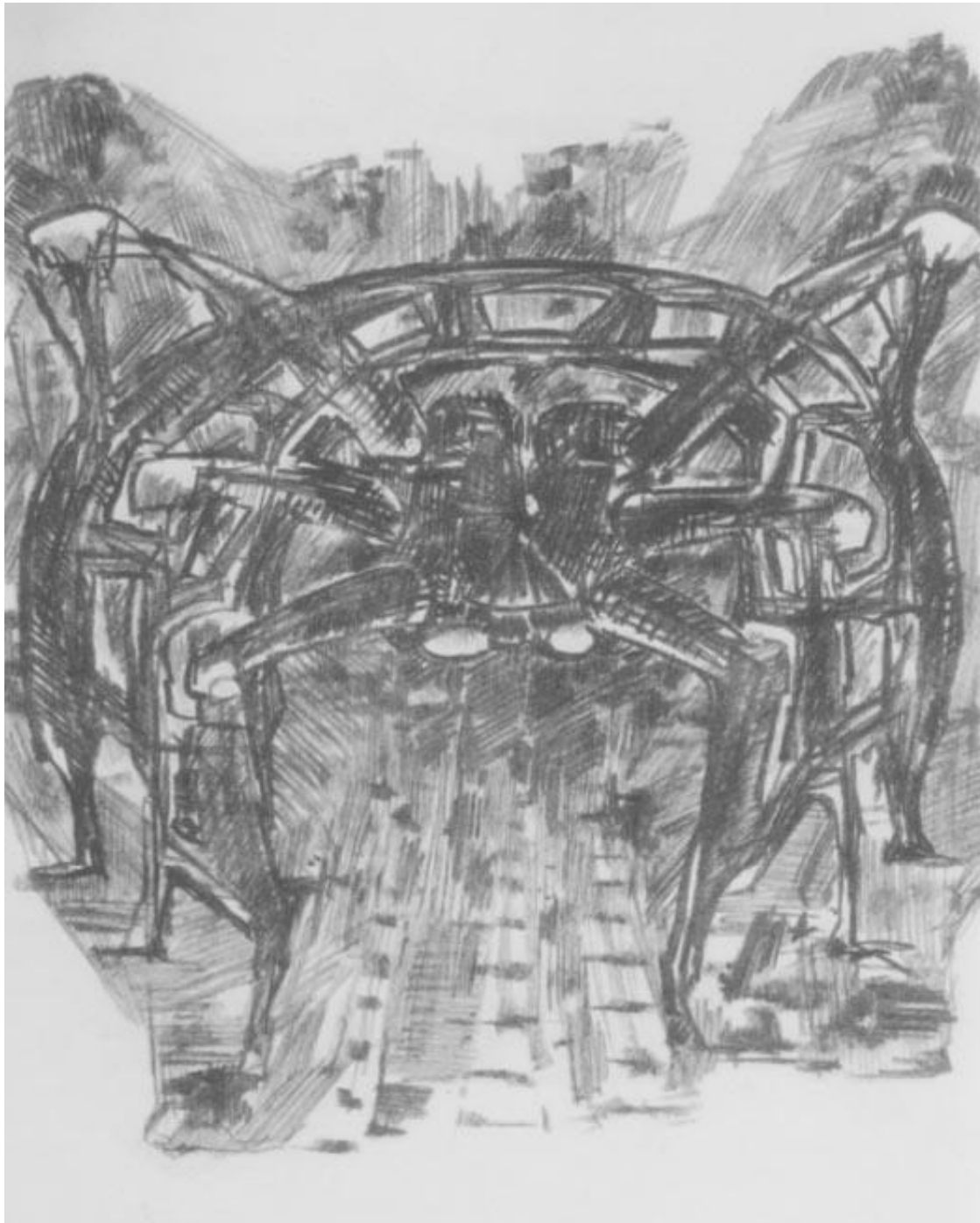
In Brücken geht sie nahtlos über  
und schlägt sich selber Nieten nach,  
wenn, was ins Netz geht, Nieten lockert.  
Gleisdreieck, Sie verlassen sogleich

Wir fahren oft und zeigen Freunden,

hier liegt Gleisdreieck, steigen aus  
und zählen mit den Fingern Gleise.  
Die Weichen locken, Putzfrau ziehn,  
das Schluslicht meint mich, doch die Spinne  
fängt Fliegen und läßt Putzfrau ziehn.  
Die Weichen locken, Putzfrau ziehn,  
das Schluslicht meint mich, doch die Spinne  
fängt Fliegen und läßt Putzfrau ziehn.

Wir starren gläubig in die Drüse  
und lesen, was die Drüse schreibt:

Gleisdreieck und den Westsektor. (Grass 11)



**Figure 4.** *Gleisdreieck* drawing by Günter Grass.

(Darmstadt: Luchthand, 1960)

### Gleisdreieck

The charwomen move from East to West.  
No, husband, stay here, what do you want over there;  
come over here, husband, what do you want here?

Railway junction, where with hot spinner  
the spider that lays rails  
took up residence and lays rails

Into bridges it spins a seamless transition  
refastens the rivets,  
where something gets caught in the net, the rivets loosen.

We often drive and show friends  
here lies railway junction, step out  
and count with the fingers rails.  
The switches allure, charwomen move,  
the taillight wants me, but the spider  
wants flies and lets the charwomen go.

We stare trustingly into the spinner  
and read what the spinner writes:  
Railroad junction, you are about to leave  
Rail junction and the Western Sector. (Author's Translation)

The drawing and poem draw on the image of a spider and its net:

Gleisdreieck, wo mit heisser Drüse  
die Spinne, die die Gleise legt,  
sich Wohnung nahm und Gleise legt. (Grass 11)

(Translation)

Railway junction, where with hot spinner  
the spider that lays rails  
took up residence and lays rails

Berlin, a divided city, is caught in the web of political, economic, social, and cultural developments generated by recent history. The giant spider looking down the hazy stretch of the railway expresses the inherent threat in the divided city. The giant spider is also a bridge between the two parts that also at the same time is a spider net. With one image, Grass makes several visual connotations. An almost surrealistic metaphorical use of space and images expresses the uncertainty and danger that hangs over the divided city.

In Brücken geht sie nahtlos über  
und schlägt sich selber Nieten nach  
wenn, was ins Netz geht, Nieten lockert. (11)

(Translation)

Into bridges it spins a seamless transition  
refastens the rivets,  
where something gets caught in the net, the rivets loosen.

In the third stanza the same imagery arouses the same aesthetic reaction just as in the first stanza the uncertainty is symbolized by the brooding spider image in the dreaded landmark of Gleisdreieck.

The human aspect of the partition of Berlin is embodied in the charwoman, who moves from the East to the West. The uncertainty and agitation of the then divided Berlin is expressed by these words:

Die Putzfrau ziehen von Ost nach West.  
Nein, Mann, bleib hier, was willst du drüben;



kommrüber, Mann, was willst du hier. (11)

(Translation)

The charwomen move from East to West.

No, husband, stay here, what do want over there;

come over here, husband, what do you want here?

In both drawing and poem, similar aesthetic values are generated in the projection of a political and social condition. The drawing through its surrealistic character presents an imagery laden visual language which the poem turns into literary images expanding and complementing the meaning and aesthetic value. Grass has written other poems and made drawings that are critical of German society. *Die Vorzüge der Windhühner*, a collection of poems and drawings is an example.

Ernst Jandl's *Filmstrip* (see fig. 5), a concrete poem, uses both visual and verbal elements to arrive at an intellectual and aesthetic expression. The alphabets in the word *Film* are manipulated and arranged to become a drawing of a filmstrip. The verbal and visual aesthetics become interwoven and inseparable. Another example is, a poem that is also a drawing, a concrete poem. In this "one piece still life with a maggot," (Grimm 55) the alphabets become lines and take on the visual structural characteristics in a drawing but at the same time retain the literary essence. The word "Wurm" visually depicts a worm as a foreign object in an apple shape drawn by the graphic arrangement of the word "Apfel." In this piece, just as in Jandl's *Film*, the visual and verbal genres Reihnhard Döhl's *Apfe.mit Wurm* (fig. 6) become one and produce the same aesthetic quality and response. In his "*Statements and Peppermints*": *Austrian Contribution to Modern World Poetry*, Ernst Jandl explains concrete poetry and draws attention to its aesthetic affinity between it with painting:

Contact with such poetry - in looking, reading, hearing - is a passing by, as with painting, a touching of the surface. It knows no depth, perspective, or three-dimensionality, and neither does it attempt to stimulate such. It doesn't feign anything. It makes clear. It makes surface clear. From the encounter with it there remains only the recollection of words, sequences, surfaces. In regard to knowledge, there remains only this: to have seen, read, heard something definite; and, in regard to possibility, only this: to

repeat the event of encounter, the brushing of a surface area. (Bjorklund 191)

The use of letters to create a pattern or draw a picture dates back to antiquity as can be found in the ancient Roman iconic pattern poems. Contemporary concrete poetry brings this to full circle when one refers back to Horace's famous words: "Ars poetica . . . Ut pictura poesis." (Horace 70)

film  
film  
film  
fi m  
f im  
fi m  
f im  
f m  
fl m  
f im  
f m  
film  
film  
f lm  
f lm  
fl m  
f lm  
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f m  
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 film

**Figure 5.** *Filmstrip*, concrete poem from Ernst Jandl, *Sprechblasen: Gedichte* (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand 1968) 13.



**Figure 6.** *Apfel mit Wurm* by Reinhard Döhl.

Screen Print on Paper, 65cm x 50 cm, 1970.

ZKM/Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

## CONCLUSION

The question of aesthetic affinity in poetry and painting is an old one with which ancient thinkers such as Plato (Cornford 323), Horace (70), and Simonides (Littimore 31) had grappled. During the Renaissance the relationship between the two so-called "sister arts" was further examined by Leonardo da Vinci (Dundas 55) and others. In the German intellectual context, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing also dealt extensively with this question and came to the conclusion that painting employs spatial structural elements while poetry uses temporal structural elements; thus painting is most suitable for expressing static bodies and the imitation of a likeness of objects, and poetry is most suitable for expressing temporal actions. (Rönnfeldt 56, Alexej 61) This conclusion initiated further critical discussion of the question by Johann Gottfried Herder, who concluded that the arts do not have to relate in their subject matter nor differ in their particular signs, instead they should be recognized as expressions from a common source, the expression of the imagination. (Abel 366)

In the twentieth century, the German theorist and aesthetician Gisbert Kranz (1-2) dealt with poems and pictures and coined the terms "Bildgedicht" or "icon poem" and "Figurengedicht" or "pattern poem." Other theorists and aestheticians all over the world have also approached the question, but from different points of view, each laying emphasis on different aspects of the arts. Santayana (41) in his *Pleasure theory* focuses on beauty as the objectification of pleasure in which a perceiver projects him or herself into a work of art. To this the German stylist Worringer (31) agrees arguing that styles of painting and poetry represent "the maximum bestowal of happiness for the humanity that created it." Formalists, of whom Immanuel Kant is the leading German historical proponent, focus on those features of the work of art that generate aesthetic response and make a division between content and form, thus placing emphasis on the principles of design and harmony to determine aesthetics in a work of art. (Kant 73) Philosophers and aesthetics theorists such as G. W. F. Hegel (39) proposed that art reveals what one might be call the truth. and the existentialist Martin Heidegger (3) agreed that art is a way in which the truth happens.

With this intellectual tradition, wealth and variety of thought in mind, it is evident that aesthetic affinity in German poetry and painting produced during the second half of the twentieth century could be examined from different points of view. It is important, however, to mention that the twentieth century phenomenon of Abstract Art and Concrete Poetry has made it, at one level, more complicated to examine works of art using age-old theories, but at another level, have simplified the perception of the relationship between the arts, especially between poetry and painting, and the aesthetic affinity they share. Jandl's concrete poems, for example, show how a poem becomes a picture and a picture a poem.

In comparing and contrasting the works of individual artists and poets dealing with the same subject matter, a further critical examination could be made of the validity of the existence of aesthetic affinity in the two art forms. In the case of individual poets and painters who produced pieces independent of each other and at different periods in time, the subject matter becomes the part of the basis, which includes structural elements, of the examination to discern the aesthetic affinity in their pieces. In discussing Wallraff's *Hier und Dort* and Immendorff's *Café Deutschland*, Delius' *Hymne* and Lüpertz's *Schwarz-Rot-Gold-dithyrambisch*, differences in the structural elements such as the temporal nature of poetry and the spatial characteristics of pictorial art become more evident, thus one may agree with Lessing's assertion that the structural elements when examined in each individual medium have limitations as determined by the very nature of the medium, be it verbal or visual. One may also agree with Santayana (41) that beauty is not just an association with the work but also feeling into it. Poems and paintings by having characteristics bestowed on them through the creative manipulation of their peculiar structural elements embody beauty that underlines the aesthetic affinity in both of them.

This is also valid for the contemporary German poems, drawings and paintings examined. They exhibit aesthetic affinity not only because the subject matters being handled are taken from the same environment, but also because even though the artists and poets who created them have to work within the confines of the structural elements of each of the two media, they reveal other parallels and do in some aspects overlap.

Finally, in some works, there are no demarcations between poetry and painting or drawing because both art forms have become one, as exemplified in concrete poems by Jandl's, *film*, and *Apfel* by Döhl. Concrete poetry ultimately captures the oneness of the visual and verbal forms. The two works are a testimony to this assertion and reconfirm the age-old conclusion that the two arts have common aesthetic qualities.

All poems, paintings and drawings discussed, except for *film* and *Apfel*, while being aesthetically linked to older German literary and artistic traditions are, however, in subject matter concerned with the contemporary German condition. The poets and artists, informed by tradition, draw from society and life around them to create works that affirm cultural rejuvenation among German people after the World War II.

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