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“Knaller-Sex für alle”: Popfeminist Body Politics in Lady Bitch Ray, Charlotte Roche, and Sarah Kuttner

Abstract

Germany has seen a recent upsurge in publications proclaiming that feminism is again an urgent matter for a new generation of women. Faced with the reactionary demography debate and the hegemony of second-wave feminism, young writers, musicians, journalists, and critics call for new models of feminism relevant to women today. As one of these viable models, popfeminism draws on dominant trends in mass culture, on pop's forty-year history as a cultural prefix in Germany, and on traditional feminism in order to create a new, ostensibly apolitical, feminist subculture based in self-stylization and individual autonomy. Shared by many popfeminist sources is the depiction of negatively coded female corporeality. This article begins with a theoretical analysis of writings on sexuality and the body in recent (pop)feminist nonfiction. It then examines the negative corporeal self-stylizations in Turkish-German rapper Lady Bitch Ray's performances since 2006, in former music video host Charlotte Roche's novel *Feuchtgebiete* (2008), and in media personality Sarah Kuttner's novel *Mängelexemplar* (2009). Ultimately, these negatively coded bodies are shown to uncover popfeminism's political intent.

“Knaller-Sex für alle”: Popfeminist Body Politics in Lady Bitch Ray, Charlotte Roche, and Sarah Kuttner

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In a 2008 article, *Missy Magazine* co-founder Chris Köver identifies a renewed interest in the so-called women’s question gaining strength since 2006. The title of Köver’s article, “Ausweitung der Feuchtgebiete” ‘wetlands expansion,’ foregrounds two specific aspects of this trend: It highlights pop culture by citing former VIVA-host Charlotte Roche’s novel *Feuchtgebiete* ‘Wetlands’ (2008; 2009), the sole literary text in Köver’s survey of contemporary feminist writings, and it reduces the ever-expanding field of new German feminism to a playfully crude vaginal reference. The convergence of these two issues—pop culture and female corporeality—reflected in Köver’s title forms the focus of my essay, which begins with a survey of the feminist-political articulation of pop culture as it is related to the female body in contemporary feminist non-fiction texts. I then question, through the lens of popfeminism, how the body might be located within this feminist-political landscape in the creative production of three women—Lady Bitch Ray’s music and video performances, Roche’s *Feuchtgebiete*, and Sarah Kuttner’s *Mängelexemplar* ‘Damaged Goods’ (2009). Ultimately, I suggest that in contemporary feminism’s search for new and creative modes of expression in which “gender politics and the space of subculture” coalesce, German popfeminism positively embraces the negatively coded female body, whether raunchy, pornographic, sick, injured, or otherwise unruly (Harris 6). This female body acts as a visual subculture born out of the tension between traditionally political notions of feminism and mass-media-driven pop culture. By endowing the individualism often ascribed to contemporary mani-

festations of German pop since reunification with a feminist spin, the popfeminist embrace of self-performance, self-acceptance, and self-mastery politicizes a movement that is often seen as highly apolitical.

Popfeminist Body Politics

“Wir wollen wieder Feministinnen sein” ‘We want to be feminists again’ (Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl 20).¹ With this battle cry the author-trio of *Wir Alphamädchen* ‘We Alpha Girls’ Meredith Haaf, Susanne Klingner, and Barbara Streidl reclaim feminism as an identity-political viability for German “girls.” Their desire to reclaim the feminist title comes from the manner in which the demography debate on plummeting birthrates raging since the turn of the millennium has crystallized into a fight about women’s national duties in the private sphere, fought in part by antifeminists (in the guise of neo-housewife Eva Herman) on the one side and second-wave feminists (the iconic spokeswoman of the German second-wave feminist movement Alice Schwarzer) on the other.

The antifeminist demography debates played a massive role in sparking renewed interest in the taboo-word feminism among young women (Stöcker, “Die Sache” 10). However, by placing women’s life-choices at the center of the survival of the German nation, the debate also actively engages in an othering and fracturing of feminism as a space of resistance, even while feminism is pushed into the spotlight (Tasker and Negra 4). Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl contextualize their call for a new girl power by outlining a brief history of feminism in (primarily West) Germany and the United States, focusing on the fight for equality and those issue-based struggles that mark the second-wave movement in both countries. They conclude by complaining that while the nineties in the US saw a third wave of feminism interested in sexuality and pop culture, Schwarzer—who continues to focus on topics such as abortion policies, pornography, prostitution, wage equality, and women in Islam—remains German feminism’s sole voice of authority (196).² This statement is intended as a provocative battle cry: German feminism, currently fractured into a “Heer von Einzelkämpferinnen” ‘army of lone fighters,’ needs a new internationally attuned public presence for a pop cultural and new media-oriented world around which to rally (Haaf, Klingner,

and Streidl 14-15, 197). Echoing this cry, Jana Hensel and Elisabeth Raether claim "Alice Schwarzer und ihre Frauen sind Historie geworden" 'Alice Schwarzer and her women have become history' (14). But Schwarzer, for her part, has a warning of her own: "Ja, alles klar, Schwestern, ihr müsst eure eigenen Erfahrungen machen, aber: Bitte fangt nicht schon wieder von vorne an" 'Ok, understood sisters, you have to have your own experiences, but: please don't start everything again from scratch' (172). By asking these sisters not to reinvent the wheel, Schwarzer suggests that those issues facing German women today should be approached with strategies developed by feminism of the past.³

Contemporary feminists write against any singular conception of true femininity or feminism, something the debates above imply exists. The titles of new feminist texts express a plurality. They wish to revolutionize the "f-word" by playing with the silencing of the word feminism as somehow unspeakable in contemporary popular culture. But instead of merely referencing feminism's taboo status, the "f" in the f-word opens feminism to the variety of discourses accessible to girls that define German femininities, including, according to the subheadings of Mirja Stöcker's essay in her edited volume *Das F-Wort* 'The F-Word,' freedom, feeling, fun, and future. The feminist framework in each of these texts remains open-ended.

Most of the contemporary feminist voices discussed here do not explicitly call themselves popfeminist. However, each of these feminist voices plays with and undermines popular culture by inserting the feminist-political into the popular and/or vice versa (Harris 7). In the online weekly *Jungle World*, Sonja Eismann, editor of *Hot Topic*—the only explicitly self-proclaimed popfeminist text of those examined here—and co-editor of *Missy Magazine*, defines popfeminism as the feminist answer to pop culture, as well as its critique. Popfeminism in its broadest sense playfully approaches traditional feminist interests by uniting gender issues, women's rights, and body politics with elements of popular culture inspired in particular by music, new media, and fashion. Popfeminism utilizes the symbols of global pop culture in order to create a critical, local, and individual subculture, a new public and visible space of resistance defined, not constrained, by gender.

By modifying feminism with the prefix pop, these young ac-

tivists engage a discourse that represents the historical melding of aesthetic avant-garde interests with political aspirations specific to Germany. Since the 1960s, the pop-prefix has been used to denote a specifically German subcultural phenomenon floating on the surface of global mass culture.⁴ German pop recodes signs of popular culture through quotations, pastiche, and cut-up methods, resignifying and redefining the original subject in a manner that reflects, exposes, and even problematizes superficial aspects of everyday reality. In their foreword to *Pop seit 1964* 'Pop since 1964,' Eckhard Schumacher and Kerstin Gleba explain pop as a way to remake and remodel culture, to utilize artificial exaggeration in its approach to reproduction and copying: "Pop ist ... eine Strategie, eine Haltung, eine Attitude" 'Pop is ... a strategy, a posture, an attitude' (12). This focus on pop as an attitude underscores the fact that pop is a performative act of self-stylization. Pop's artificiality intentionally subverts "dominant notions of taste" (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 27). As a subversive element, pop thus produces intentional unrest and unease that, in its politicized form, can lead to aesthetic acts of resistance. Gleba and Schumacher see this to be a German phenomenon: "Pop war ... immer schon ein internationales Phänomen ... Nur [in Deutschland] ist Pop immer auch ein Problem" 'Pop has ... always been an international phenomenon ... Only [in Germany] is pop always also a problem' (14). In a country that since 1945 expects its literature, authors, and the literary market to be publically engaged, literature seemingly void of all political intention and which looks beyond the constraints of its medium or national borders for inspiration is provocative and causes unrest (Gansel/Neumeister 183). Unlike its Anglo-American counterparts, German pop is subversive, an irritant demanding not casual acceptance, but engagement as it negotiates between hegemony of (international) dominant culture and the diversity of German (local) subcultural identities.

This conception of unrest and performativity is where we see new German feminism's pop roots. Popfeminism wishes to shake up accepted notions of feminism but also, and perhaps more importantly, to explore the limits of what "Popkultur für Frauen" 'pop culture for women,' as the *Missy Magazine* tagline reads, might be.⁵ Inspired in part by the 1990s Riot Grrrl movement in the United States, popfeminism focuses on feminist topics by appropriating and recod-

ing in a new pastiche the often superficial, empty, and anti-feminist codes of market and consumer driven popular culture.⁶ The manner in which feminist strategies perforate pop culture—and indeed the manner in which feminism itself is redrawn and resignified through pop culture—can be seen best in the popfeminist understanding of the themes and problems confronting feminism today. In form and content the texts combine topics typically part of the traditional, or rather, second-wave feminist domain with a third-wave embrace of aspects of popular culture and sexuality often seen as problematic for feminist politics: pornography, rap, or fashion. This approach to feminism and pop can also devalue feminism, for the danger becomes that pop culture could also subsume those feminist impulses it inspires and empty feminist codes of all political meaning. Eismann cautions that women's flesh should not be used yet again to provide pop with an appropriately tailored feminine surface in order to make feminism appealing, "sondern umgekehrt sollte Popkultur durch feministische Strategien perforiert und erschüttert werden" 'but rather pop culture should be perforated and shaken up by feminist strategies' ("Einleitung" 10). While popfeminism is informed by pop culture, it must be also critical of its hegemony. Popfeminist texts should, in this formulation, approach pop culture in a feminist manner and feminist culture in a pop manner, resignifying both.

Because pop culture is ever present, feminism that utilizes, subverts, or otherwise reconfigures pop culture is not an abstract concept, but instead something that "als gelebte Alltagskultur alle Lebensbereiche durchdringt" 'as a lived everyday culture pervades all areas of life' (Eismann, "Einleitung" 12). Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl echo this: "Unser Feminismus ist aus dem Alltag entstanden..." 'Our feminism originated from daily experience...' (7). That the realities of young women in Germany today are part of feminism's new story is also the driving force behind Hensel and Raether's *Neue Deutsche Mädchen* 'New German Girls.' Popfeminism is therefore an everyday concept that identifies the "level of the personal rather than the structural [as] a more compelling site of change..." (Harris 7). By utilizing girl instead of woman, seen in two out of the three titles mentioned above, the editors and authors playfully join notions of power with the commodification of feminized mainstream youth culture. Play is essential here as a manner of staking claim to

a third wave of German feminism free of the monikers “hässlich, spaß- und männerfeindlich, ironiefrei und unsexy” ‘ugly, anti-fun and anti-men, free of irony, and unsexy’ (Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl 13). Girls, the editors and authors of these texts suggest, can have an equal amount of fun, excess, and adventure as their male counterparts with the same sexual libido and drive to succeed that in mainstream culture defines boyhood (Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl 42-43). Therefore “girl” is a discursive concept, an identity in which the German woman can clothe herself.

Part of this discursive and playful girlishness includes using the pop medium in order to engage in feminist stylization of the body as an act of performative resistance. This resistance is articulated through an embrace of non-girlish, and even non-feminist, behavior and acts of representation, thus putting into motion pop as an element of unrest. The use of the f-word in its dual English meaning is intended as a political act. Sexualized vocabulary that embraces pornographic or deliberate raunchiness teetering on the edge of propriety is an essential part of political popfeminism. Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl conclude that when propagated by women, pornographic references reaffirm that: “Feminismus macht sexy” ‘feminism makes you sexy,’ their chapter headings universally claiming “Knaller-Sex für alle” ‘explosive sex for all,’ while reminding us “Feministinnen haben den besseren Sex” ‘feminists have better sex’ (97, 63, 66). Packaging this central theme of contemporary feminism into such sound-bytes essentially popifies sexual identity. But behind these sound-bytes, we find very real conceptions of self-empowerment. As Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl claim: “Feministinnen sind heute eher für viel Sex und für guten Sex. Weil sie ihre Körper mögen und deswegen gern spaßige Dinge damit anstellen” ‘Feminists today are in favor of a lot of sex and good sex. Because they like their bodies and therefore like to have fun with them’ (23). The f-word feminist is able to redefine the playing field for positive action through a coy relationship to propriety and register. The bad name that feminism has received is only reversible through the incorporation of the naughtiness implied by the English pejorative.

Therefore the body, physicality, and indeed provocative sexual play are all already central to the new definition of the f-word. While these texts are essentially interested in similar body issues as tradi-

tional second-wave feminism—abortion rights, contraception, eating disorders, pornography—they approach these in a manner that entails acceptance rather than protest, for protest would demand women to take up positions as victims (Warnecke 31). The texts agree that the most provocative facet of new women's movements today is the redefinition of the body as a raw material that can be molded to match each individual woman's, or girl's, self-stylization (Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl 68; Warnecke 37-38). The feminist understanding that the body creates and displays meaning inscribed by a masculine dominated system continues to be recognized, but also manipulated (Freudenschuss 109). Women's satisfaction with and control over their bodies as well as "Hemmungslosigkeit" 'lack of inhibition' with respect to sexuality is paramount (Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl 66). The political aspects of the body no longer lie in the desire to change public perception or policy, but instead in the embrace of a D.I.Y. (Do it Yourself) sensibility with regard to one's own body or lifestyle.⁷ In turn, D.I.Y. ethos, once a fringe approach to small-scale cultural production, has now at all levels been mainstreamed, gone pop, becoming the subject of reality shows, cable television programming, and magazines.

When applied to the body, D.I.Y. highlights, as Warnecke suggests, the implicitness of women's absolute subjectivity and autonomy (24). Feminist identity becomes an "Antwort auf die pluralen Möglichkeiten" 'answer to the plurality of possibilities' (Warnecke 30). Part of this plurality includes the freedom to select and perform a specific feminist discourse. These discourses may range from shaving to MySpace soft pornography as degrees of engagement in performative desire. Important here is not how individuals define specific body practices in correspondence with feminist expectations, but instead "wie vielfältig diese Gestaltungsprozesse sind, wie viele unterschiedliche Körper- und Geschlechterfacetten hier deutlich werden" 'how multifarious these processes of configuration are, how many different facets of the body and gender crystallize here' (Schmitz 52). In the following section, I will pursue corporeal self-stylization in contemporary writings or creative productions by three German women. While none of these women explicitly locates herself within the popfeminist movement, they are no strangers to media-based pop performativity. Controversial Turkish-Ger-

man rapper-academic Ray mobilizes Internet-based networking platforms such as MySpace and YouTube to disseminate her own vulgar take on representations of the female body and sexuality in rap-inspired text, image, song, and fashion. The mass-market and male-driven women's beauty industry subversively inspires Roche, herself a recognizable pop icon, to configure a "female grotesque" in her novel *Feuchtgebiete* (Russo). Finally, media personality Kuttner linguistically recodes recognizable pop cultural artifacts to describe a young girl's experience with and ultimate embrace of depression. While each of these women approaches the negatively coded female body and pop culture in a very different way, the public reception has repeatedly read these women and their texts as ushering in a new wave of unruly girls onto the pop-cultural landscape. Ultimately, I will explore if and how popfeminism may open up new readings of these texts as subcultural and subversive performances of resistance to the hegemonic, male-dominated, pop-cultural configuration of female bodies.

"Vagina Style" as a "Fucking Event": Ray, Roche, and Kuttner

The *Bild* newspaper calls her a naked rapper and *Stern* magazine gives her the title of "Doktor-Schlampe" 'Doctor Slut' and highlights her "Emanzen-Ader" 'women's-libber vein' (Gernert). Not only the provocative texts of the Turkish-German rapper Lady Bitch Ray prompt such sensationalist labeling, but also her double-life: Ray is the pseudonym of Reyhan Sahin, PhD student and lecturer at the University of Bremen. This good girl/bad girl image might capture the media's attention, but the alliance of bitch with women's libber also ambiguously enforces the pejorative aspects of the f-word.

The double-entendre of the f-word also describes Ray's use of the sexist world of rap in a manner that conflates feminist with bitch, without rewriting anti-female rap-language. Ray's texts and her self-presentation in the online networking site MySpace collapse the highly sexualized and misogynistic tradition of rap culture with erotic self-empowerment: While her record label and line of clothing are entitled Vagina Records and Vagina Style respectively, connoting such empowerment, her lyrics, blogs, videos, and interviews are riddled with anti-female pejoratives. These sexualized and female-body centered phrases are, in turn, utilized in a way that extracts

their violent effect, even while retaining their seemingly anti-female meanings. In "Ich hasse dich" 'I hate you,' for example, Ray sings an anthem against German female pop-stars such as Sarah Connor by stringing together female derogatory terms, the more harmless of which include, "Hure, Tusse, Luder, Schrulle, Kerbe, Schlampe, ich hasse dich" 'Whore, bimbo, hussy, old bat, twat, slut, I hate you.' By placing a litany of such terms in her refrain, she deescalates what otherwise could become a linguistically violent act.

At the same time Ray intends, through her use of language that is entrenched in anti-female pop culture, to incite particularly young girls to rethink their approach toward their bodies and sexuality. Her "10 Gebote des Vagina Styles" '10 Commandments of Vagina Style' posted on MySpace utilizes vulgar language to approach girl power, body self-awareness, diets and eating disorders, the importance of higher education, sexual awareness, and self-empowerment.⁸ It is therefore fitting that among many self-labels, including that of porno-rapper, Ray also calls herself a feminist of the new generation in the tradition of Schwarzer. Claudia Fromme writes that Ray wishes for bitch in her name to be understood in a positive manner "eine, die weiß, was sie will und sich das nimmt..." 'a woman who knows what she wants and takes it...' The inhibition in Ray's approach to sexuality and to female agency in sexual performance is also central to her music and other videos posted on YouTube. In these, Ray embodies typical aspects of heteronormative erotic fantasy, for example by wearing a highly revealing nurse's outfit or her own line of clothing that reveals her genitals. She thus plays on or even quotes with her body pop-pornographic expectations of visually represented objectified desire that, in turn, she uses to address female sexual agency.

Can the sexualized contents of Ray's texts, lyrics, and videos be understood in the broader contemporary feminist context outlined above or do they merely remain successful in their wish to shock and provoke? For Ray, provocation and titillation, when enacted by women, come together to define a feminist-political impulse. In discussing pornographic and erotic elements in Chicana rap, Beauty Bragg and Pancho McFarland suggest that the "representations of sexuality and sexual politics provide the most direct route for examining the tensions between male-centered and feminist traditions

in the music and youth subculture,” continuing: “A feminist politics speaks of female sexual and personal empowerment expressed through the notion of mutually gratifying sexual expression” (2). As rap is a traditionally male domain, female rap such as that produced by Ray appropriates and indeed controls the display of female sexuality as constructed by a pornographic male gaze. This exposes the manner in which rap culture, as part of pop culture, has cultivated male and female desiring subjects. Clara Völker claims that in the German rap and hip-hop industry women are expected either to be sexualized objects used to promote male records, or to make their own niche, not insert themselves into the mainstream industry (255). As a female rapper utilizing the language of heterosexual and heteronormative pop culture just like many of her male colleagues, Ray maintains anti-female and discriminatory language as a mode of female sexual empowerment. She utilizes precisely those masculine expectations of sexuality found in contemporary culture to reach young girls.

Moreover, as a Turkish-German female rapper, Ray’s body, which is her primary vehicle of performance, is marked as triply other. If hip-hop and rap in the Turkish context is characterized both by exoticism and “double inauthenticity,” in the sense of being “foreigners in an alien culture reproducing the ultimately alien art,” then Ray’s reproduction of and also subversion of the expectations of both Turkish and German rap exoticizes her one step further (Soysal 4). For example, in the song “Deutsche Schwänze” ‘German Dicks,’ she vulgarly pronounces all German men, and with them Germany, sexually inadequate. While this anti-German sentiment corresponds to the language of male Turkish-German rappers, her use of sexualized language as a woman shuts her off from exactly that community. This continued disturbance of any notion of acceptability—at the levels of feminism, of rap culture, and of migrant culture—highlights the subversive and playfully political aspects of Ray’s performance.⁹ By engaging as her main vehicle of empowerment dirty speech primarily derived from female genitalia, Ray perforates and disturbs pop culture, but also other subcultures, with her own feminist strategy (Eismann, “Einleitung” 10).

The performative desire or delight in performance implicated in Ray’s lingual and visual f-words is also central to Roche’s 2008

Feuchtgebiete. Roche's focus remains on female subjective autonomy in sexual self-empowerment, though her novel links feminist resistance to the grotesque female body. If Ray's heterosexualized language typical of the rap industry perforates pop-cultural passivity towards female sexualization, Roche's grotesque vocabulary exaggerates and criticizes the rules of hygiene and propriety propagated by the pop-cultural commodification and display of women's bodies.¹⁰ *Feuchtgebiete* tells of the 18-year-old Helen Memel whom we find convalescing in the hospital after a mishap with a razor. Throughout her stay the protagonist seeks and retains power over her body not only by making decisions with regard to her sexual experiences, but also by gathering knowledge about the physical processes her body undergoes, be these post-operative, medical, hygienic, or sexual in nature. That these types of knowledge are conjoined exposes in a mildly satirical fashion the manner in which expectations of behavioral propriety also keep girls from accessing the power that mass culture and medical culture retain over female bodies.

Feuchtgebiete undermines expectations of femininity by negating the feminine images found in dominant culture (Harris 3). The book begins with hemorrhoids, which Helen lovingly calls her cauliflower, and continues to traverse a physical landscape that the narrator herself finds "sehr unmädchenhaft" 'very ungirlish' (8). Already from the outset, resistance and acceptance are at the forefront of the representation of the female body, a resistance to feminine propriety and acceptance of physical and sexual difference. When we meet Helen, we find her in the hospital awaiting an operation to repair an anal fissure, accidentally self-inflicted while shaving the area around her hemorrhoids in preparation for anal sex. "Wenn einer mich liebt oder auch nur geil auf mich ist, dann sollte doch so ein Blumenkohl keine Rolle spielen" 'If someone loves me or is just hot for me then such a cauliflower shouldn't really play a role' (9). This approach to the different body, which reads much like the statements on acceptance found in the popfeminist non-fictional texts outlined above, is here augmented by pop humor. Helen complains that the anal fissure is the fault of the Lady Shaver "Feel like Venus. Be a goddess!" (10). The reference to the absurd branding of women's razors brings the differently coded female sexual body into line with the media-powered beauty industry. In keeping with

Roche's claims that the book is written in opposition to this industry, Helen tells the reader, "Hygiene wird bei mir kleingeschrieben" 'Hygiene is not important to me,' calling the act of attempting to cover up natural body smells "Vergewaltigung durch Hygienefanatiker" 'rape by hygiene fanatics' (18, 19). In resistance to the industry, she makes and reuses tampons out of toilet paper and erotically enjoys her own body at its most unhygienic, believing her unwashed vagina and its fluids to have aromatic aphrodisiac properties (19). Helen retains control over her unwashed body by exploring and gathering knowledge about its sexual potential, for example by tasting her vaginal fluid extensively so that she can confirm its erotic viability; by pulling back her shaven labia with an eyelash curler to examine its visual attractiveness; and by appropriating potentially derogatory terms for the vagina as her own terms of endearment (50, 67).

But while the book is explicitly written against the hygiene industry, Roche's depiction of the "detritus of the body" as a place of risk is strongly rooted in a turn inward (Russo 2, 10). Helen's approach to all aspects of her body and sexuality in the novel exemplifies in many ways the D.I.Y. attitude toward the self-stylization of the female body as described above. When read in conjunction with popfeminist non-fictional texts, the sexual self-stylization as presented in the book is individual, personal, self-fulfilling, and based in everyday experiences. In fact, the force of the book as outwardly, that is publically, feminist-political is disturbed by the framing story: on the first page, and repeated at stages throughout her hospital stay, Helen expresses her desire to bring her divorced mother and father together at her bedside in order that they may fall in love again. This childish desire for the happily-ever-after is made less innocent as she rips open her stitches by sitting on an iron pedal at the end of her bed in order to buy herself more time in the hospital (169). This broken home aspect of her differently coded sexual psyche is exacerbated by the end of the text, where it is revealed that she saved her mother from committing suicide and murdering Helen's brother. This experience, along with the divorce, would appear to provide an explanation for Helen's approach to her body; the book seems to suggest that Helen's non-normative sexuality is rooted in childhood trauma. The fairy-tale conclusion seems therefore appropriate: with a bicycle standing in for a white horse,

Helen is whisked away by her male nurse Robin, who saves her from returning to her neurotic, hygiene-fanatical mother (217).

The final scene, however, complicates this simple end to a physically excessive journey. Before Helen leaves with Robin, she creates a portrait of her mother and little brother as she found them on the day of the suicide attempt by using clothing from her bag and ripping out large clumps of her own hair (218-19). Helen's "Abschiedsbrief" 'farewell letter' visually resists her family's silence: "Die haben alle gehofft, dass ich das vergesse. So was kann man nicht vergessen" 'They all hoped that I would forget. Something like that can't be forgotten.' (219). In strong opposition to her family's silence about the attempted murder-suicide, the book closes with a scream, "ich lege den Kopf in den Nacken und schreie" 'I lay my head back and scream' (220). The scream that breaks the silence along with the visual representation of trauma through Helen's own physical body problematizes the reading of Roche's debut novel as simply obscenely pornographic, in bad taste, or as a pat explanation for childhood trauma. While her sexual explorations might perhaps be prompted by trauma, they also connote power or mastery of that trauma in self-guided and controlled eroticism. In a 2007 interview with Thea Dorn, Roche comments on the role that outward displays of (even pornographic) sexuality play for young girls: "Das ist doch eine klare Demonstration von Macht" 'It's just a clear demonstration of power' (141). This power expresses itself through self-guided sexual potency grounded in acquiring knowledge about all forms of one's own sexuality and body. The final scream of the novel embraces the unruly self-expression of the body by providing Helen a loud voice of refusal.

Kuttner, whose book *Mängelexemplar* shares this straightforward approach to the injured, sick, or traumatized female body, is, like Roche, also widely known for her work on the music channel VIVA, as well as for her continuing work on other television stations such as MTV, ARD, and Sat.1. Kuttner's book tells the story of Karo Herrmann, a young woman in her mid-twenties who just lost her job as an event organizer for media outlets and has broken up with her boyfriend, two life-changing events that catapult Karo into a deep depression. As in the case of Helen, we discover as the novel progresses that an ugly divorce, a neurotic mother, and a sexually

abusive uncle provide additional traumatic background for this depression. The novel narrates Karo's experiences with panic attacks, therapy sessions, visits to psychiatrists, battles with medicine, as well as her search for love. While very different from Roche's text or Ray's lyrics in that it is neither sexual nor grotesque, Kuttner's pop language continues to break open the barrier of propriety when it comes to feminine expectations.

The language Kuttner uses treats depression not with dark seriousness but instead with ironic playfulness. Through her use of recognizable media-coded language, Kuttner allows the representation of depression to float on the surface of pop culture. Like Roche's Helen, Kuttner's Karo integrates commercial branding into her identity construction, such as the phrasing that combines the slogan for the *Du darfst* brand of margarine and for the mobile telephone company Vodafon: "Ich will so bleiben, wie ich bin! *Make the most of now!*" 'I want to stay just like I am! *Make the most of now!*' (19). However, Karo also interweaves song texts into her descriptions of her medical journey: "Es geht los! Der erste Schritt zur Besserung! *The first cut is the deepest*" 'It's starting! The first step toward recovery! *The first cut is the deepest*' (29). These pop-song inspired comments become increasingly awkward due to the combined use of English and German, as in the following, almost untranslatable quotation "*You can get it if you really want. Ich wante vermutlich nicht really genug. Auf der anderen Seite wante ich zumindest genug, um ordentlich unzufrieden zu sein, es nicht zu getten*" 'You can get it if you really want. I probably do not want really enough. On the other hand I want at least enough, in order to be totally unsatisfied when I don't get' (54). This awkwardness in the German text produces an irritation that disturbs the otherwise intact surface of the pop cultural quotation. In turn, this puts into question the effectiveness of using pop culture as personal body armor, here appropriated to protect Karo from the physical and emotional experience of depression.

In her review of the novel, Ursula März claims that because of this jargon, the protagonist is recognizable as an "urbanes Wesen der Gegenwart," a 'contemporary urban being.' The first line of the book acts as a signpost for this urban performativity: "Eine Depression ist ein fucking Event!" 'Depression is a fucking event!' (7). And indeed, through Karo's language, the personal experience of

depression is performed as a pop cultural event. "Das böse Tier hat sein Go, es ist Stage Time, die Vorband ist endlich weg, der Main Act darf zeigen, was er kann. Und er kann. Ich breche sofort und heftig in Tränen aus" "The mean animal has its go and it's stage time, the opening band is finally gone and the main act can strut its stuff. And it struts. I immediately and heavily break into tears" (32). Karo performs her own broken identity as the main act, her uncontrollable body countered and seemingly controlled by flippant, pop, and staged language that is the articulation of her journey through depression.

The main character of Kuttner's novel never expresses feminist sensibility and is, despite some failed attempts at masturbation, highly asexual. However, the emotionally disturbed body remains the centerpiece of a superficial, pop-culturally informed femininity. In her language, depression, anxiety, and physical or mental unruliness are pop-culturally recoded to be an essential part of performative identity. The taboo that Kuttner breaks is not one of obscenity, but one of making depression as harmless as party talk, and ultimately an aspect of contemporary female identity to be accepted (Schultz). As Karo lies in the park at the end of the novel after deciding to continue with her medication, she self-prescribes the following: "Den Kopf endlich ausschalten. Mein schönes Leben leben. Denn eigentlich ist es tatsächlich schön, mein Leben!" 'Finally turn off my brain. Enjoy my wonderful life. Because my life is really actually wonderful!' (261). By letting go and accepting her illness, Karo is ultimately able to take control.

Much has been made of the affinities between Ray and Roche, and again between Roche and Kuttner. When Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* hit the shelves and quickly became a hotly discussed bestseller, Ray claimed in multiple sensationalist venues that vulgarity was her territory and that Roche was merely badly copying her vagina style.¹¹ The territorial claim to sexualized language is of course itself a coup, for it led to media claims that a battle would soon ensue. In reviews and media responses to Kuttner's text, references to both Roche and Ray also abound. Not only their shared media career paths (paving the way for pop categorizations of their texts) take center-stage in the pinpointing of commonalities, but in the case of Roche and Kuttner, also the marketing of the books: the two book covers—Roche's pink

book sports a band-aid, Kuttner's grey-white book sports a safety pin—are considered to be clues to their internal affinities (Scholz). Each author is seen to capture “den Zeitgeist weiblicher Selbstfindung” ‘the zeitgeist of female self-discovery’ (Buchner).

It is perhaps fitting that Roche remains the center of the media's reception of this constellation of women, for she has been singled out as the only feminist other than Schwarzer who is recognizable as such to the German public (Eismann, “Einleitung” 11). But should Roche be understood as the pop-replacement for the institution of Schwarzer in contemporary feminism? Rainer Moritz claims that Roche's novel provides a new generation with a voice. The Charlotte-Roche-Generation feels itself trapped by the expectations contemporary culture places on the female body. By using the label generation, Moritz places the novel within the German pop-literary canon established in the mid-1990s. Moreover, the title of his article, “Golf im Feuchtgebiet” ‘Golf in the Wetlands’ genders this trajectory: we turn away from the boy-dominated and cultivated “Generation Golf” to find ourselves in unruly feminine wetlands.¹² That Moritz names the Charlotte-Roche-Generation after the author—not the text—is telling. Ray, Roche, and Kuttner are, through the media and public reception of their texts, each transformed into a pop-cultural commodity. Moreover, in reviews and interviews reporters repeatedly project an autobiographical dimension onto their writings.

However, this dual commodification of text and body might indeed be the authors', or even popfeminism's, intention. In discussion with colleagues Thomas Meinecke, Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre, and Schumacher, Gleba comments that the work of contemporary female authors is often categorized as pop not because of the reception of their texts but instead the “Rezeption der Autorin, des Geschlechts, der Haare” ‘reception of the author, the gender, the hair’ (365). Physical appearance and femininity become important pop-cultural commodities, just as or even more important than their cultural production. The female author and her text are seen as indivisible, a statement to which Meinecke adds: “Eine Frau, die schreibt, ist eigentlich schon Pop, das ist das Problem” ‘A woman who writes is already pop, that is the problem’ (366). Meinecke wishes here to speak out against the reception of female authors in lieu of their texts. The passivity suggested by the statement applies to Kuttner,

who vehemently denies all autobiographical and self-performative impulses critics wish to see in her text. For Ray and Roche, however, being pop is not a problem, but rather it may be the point. The consumption of both text and body as pop, that is, as a disturbance of hegemonic culture, suggests a popfeminist intervention that resignifies and therefore questions mainstream media and reception of text and performance.

Conclusion

As outlined above, contemporary German feminisms wish to revitalize feminist thinking after decades of dominance by politically-driven second-wave feminism that has earned a reputation as serious, dull, and void of desire or erotic potential. They do so by incorporating play, pop culture, impropriety, and radical acceptance into all forms of German femininity.¹³ Read within the popfeminist framework, Ray, Roche, and Kuttner recode the female body as a site of resistance by rearticulating feminist body politics for a pop-culturally literate girl culture that refuses to see contemporary German feminism as a unified, historically founded, or goal-driven movement (Harris 5). The body in their texts functions as a self-stylized and individually performative space for representing women's autonomy over a variety of discourses found in dominant, mass, and pop culture.

Meinecke's sweeping statement that "a woman who writes is already pop" returns us to the risk run by popfeminism as expressed by Eismann above: while on the one hand feminism remains bogged down by absolutely unmarketable and unattractive associations, "werden auf der anderen Seite die ihrer Inhalte entleerten 'coolen' Codes der popkulturell aktiven Feministinnen unbekümmert in den Markt eingespeist" 'on the other hand the "cool" codes of pop-culturally active feminists are emptied of their contents and injected into the market without a second thought' ("Einleitung" 9). The utopia of a feminism that is pop culturally literate but also problematizes pop must constantly contend with the reality that popfeminism itself as well as popfeminist artifacts can also become pop-cultural commodities. Eismann sees this dilemma of pop culture to have finally reached feminism just at the moment where feminism has attracted a very different audience-base through pop

culture (“Einleitung” 9-10). This dilemma is particularly well illustrated by the success of *Feuchtgebiete*, for the public consumption of the text turned the book’s publication into a performative, pop-cultural event. März confirms this when she claims Roche’s book became a bestseller because the public wished to participate in buying a sensationalized book as an act of community building, joining in the pop-cultural event through purchasing power. The consumption of popfeminist cultural production runs the risk of draining this production of its feminist codes.

Eismann’s warning that the dilemma of pop culture has reached popfeminism, that is, the danger that feminism’s political message may be drained as the market consumes and subsumes popfeminist cultural production, also applies to the popfeminist women themselves. However, as suggested in my reading of Meinecke’s claim, the understanding of women or feminism as pop need not be interpreted as a passive effect of market or reception-driven strategies and therefore as negative or non-political. Ray and Roche, and by extension Kuttner, engage in self-commodification as a form of resistance and thus offer compelling possibilities for a renewed and productive engagement with and re-signification of feminist body politics. The connotations of the term pop in the German context allow me to re-write Meinecke’s statement in a manner that must be positively understood to subvert dominant notions of both feminism and mass culture: In becoming more popular, contemporary German feminism has also become more pop.

Notes

1 All translations are my own.

2 A brief look at the table of contents of her 2007 book *Die Antwort* ‘The Answer’ confirms the historical continuity of Schwarzer’s politics.

3 This debate between new and old feminism is by no means specific to Germany. See Whelehan and Henry for discussions of US-based second- and third-wave feminisms.

4 For a summary of the German pop tradition, see Arnold.

5 *Missy Magazine*, founded in 2008, aligns with the North American periodical *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*. The sudden emergence of a feminist blog scene in Germany logged on its website (www.missy-magazine.de) seems to be the post-millennial answer to the feminist Zines of the 1990s. For a dis-

cussion of Zines in Germany today see Zobl.

6 Popfeminist authors comment often that only one German-language text, the Austrian-based *Lips, Tits, Hits, Power?* attempted in 1998 to apply the Riot Grrrl movement to the German-language context. See Baldauf and Weingartner.

7 Eismann reserves an entire section for the D.I.Y. ethos in *Hot Topic*, including essays with topics ranging from music and fashion to drag.

8 The authors of *Wir Alphamädchen* devote a chapter to such networking sites, claiming the Internet is a space where young women can prove that the feminine should not always be associated with the private (136).

9 Thank you to Maria Stehle for noting the aspect of race here and inspiring a more diversified reading of Ray's body.

10 Roche has stated this intention in a number of interviews following the book's publication, including an interview with Julia Encke. See Roche, Interview by Julia Encke.

11 See for example Ebensen and Kuschel or the play-by-play comparison in Peter.

12 The term "Generation Golf" refers to a book by Florian Illies and came to be associated with those born between 1965 and 1975 who could be characterized by a narcissistic and materially obsessed apoliticism, but also more specifically with male pop authors of that generation.

13 For a discussion of this shift in the Anglo-American context see Heywood and Drake. Reger provides a more recent look at US third-wave feminism, including an extensive bibliography.

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