

Introduction

A historical analogy and its derived effects

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Emil Elg speaking from the podium in The workers museum's assembly hall, September 3rd, 2016. Photo: David Stjernholm

Introduction: A historical analogy and its derived effects

By Solveig Daugaard, Laura Luise Schultz and Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, which to many observers compared disturbingly well to the 1929 crash on Wall Street, Western democracies have been insistently haunted by the spectre of the 1930s. Prompted by the rising support for authoritarian and xenophobic parties and movements in most European countries over the course of the 2010s, and intensified by the presidency of Donald Trump in the US, historians, political scientists, cultural critics, and commentators have produced an infinite number of articles, op-eds, and book-length studies taking up the comparison between the 1930s and today. The common end of most of them has been warnings against a possible return of authoritarian political movements relating to the historical fascist parties that wrecked the world over the course of this emblematic decade ending in World War II and the Holocaust. (see for example Traverso 2017, Gordon 2018, Snyder 2017a, Grossberg 2018, Badiou 2019).

While the historically informed political outcries have resonated widely, we have also experienced an upsurge in aesthetic interest directed at the 1930s and the decade's account with authoritarian movements, from historical narratives diving into the violent and spectacular events of the decade, such as the German television series *Babylon Berlin* (2017-2021), to contemporary artworks drawing on loaded political iconography, activist approaches, and other aesthetic strategies from the decade's mass movements. To mention but a few, for example the Danish theatre makers Fix&Foxy's re-make from 2012 of Leni Riefenstahl's infamous propaganda film *Triumph des Willens* (1934), and the German artist collective Frankfurter Hauptschule's exposure of fascist imagery circulating in contemporary media and culture.

From the other end of the political spectrum and from the other side of the charged relationship between art and politics, we have seen politicians perverting the disruptive aesthetics of the interwar avant-gardes – from Trump and Bolsonaro posing as rowdy clowns on a presidential level to ultra-right-wing Danish artist Uwe Max Jensen's dilettante performances with urine and faeces, fouling art institutions and other artists' works. It has been demonstrated, not only that “every decade has its own 1930s” as the Swedish playwright Lucas Svensson has put it, but that a decade can easily have several versions of the 1930s. The symbolic and imaginative power of the 1930s seems to be so extensive and so contested that representations and re-circulations of the 1930s are bound to feed polarisation and controversy, not least in a contemporary media ecology which is dominated by global digital platforms governed by polarising algorithms.

Counteractions and taboos

If – at least from a helicopter's view – there has been a certain consistency to the message of many of the political outcries on the return of the authoritarianism of the 1930s, it is somewhat more complicated to estimate their immediate political effects. Although leading voices in the choir of cautionary historical analysis predicted in disturbing detail the storm on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021 – the “Reichstag Fire” of Trump's presidency (Snyder 2017) – and other crucial events in recent years, it is immediately easier to spot the political effects of the massive *counteractions* that the ventilation of the interwar analogy has motivated. The political efficiency of this backlash

has also been felt in the political debate in the Scandinavian welfare states where it has strongly affected the climate for artistic and cultural production, and the legitimacy of dedicating academic attention to it.

The backlash reactions are typically founded in a mainstream historical stereotype of the 1920s-40s. Primarily grounded in the well-known war atrocities of the National Socialist regime in Germany, it performs a profound demonisation of fascism as the worst political scenario imaginable while simultaneously isolating it to the specific regimes in Italy and Germany that lost World War II. Consequently, one can incapsulate such political ideologies as a purely historical issue that in all essentialities ended with the Potsdam Agreement of 1945. These reactions comprise a generally dismissive rhetorical behaviour towards the interwar analogy that involves an automatic disqualification of any cultural or political analysis that actualises parallels to the 1930s if it includes mention of historical fascism and Nazism as ultimately disrespectful towards the victims of the Holocaust.¹ Also, as professor in political aesthetics Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen has pointed out, contrary to the situation in the interwar years, today the word “fascist” is rarely applied as a positive description of anyone’s own aspirations, but as an empty label for scolding a political opponent (Bolt Rasmussen 2017). However, as he also argues, if we adhere to a definition of fascism as “an extreme nationalist ideology intent on rebuilding an imagined organic community by excluding foreigners” (Bolt Rasmussen 2021, 3-4), the label remains of contemporary relevance.

Considering the central position of “the exclusion of foreigners” in fascist ideology, past and present, it is unsurprising how, in a Danish context the taboo logic has been extended to the use of the word “racist” which by politicians from across the political spectrum has been tied to a historically specific ideology drawing on eugenic traditions, thus effectively transforming the word “racist” from a legitimate concept to criticise abuse of power and bias against racialised minorities to an unutterable insult that one risks lawsuits for saying. More specifically, we saw a series of lawsuits for libel filed by the Danish People’s Party up through the 1990s and 2000s whenever the word “racism” was used in public discourse to describe their politics.² As a perfect illustration of the intersectional feminist theorist and independent scholar Sara Ahmed’s concept of the feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010), this led to an effective transformation of the one calling attention to the abuse into the abuser, and the perpetrator of abusive behaviour into the victim: not only shooting the messenger but legitimising this act by posing as a victim.

This type of response is dodging all historical comparisons of contemporary forms of authoritarian oppression with historical fascism, however motivated they may appear, frequently preventing them from contributing to further conversation in the institutions and contexts at which they were aimed.³

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- 1) In a Danish context, historian Bent Blüdnikow has been an outspoken proponent of this position, describing the interwar analogy as “an ahistorical and dangerous relativisation of historical Nazism” (Lindberg 2019).
 - 2) Several journalists and public figures were convicted, including the author Lars Bonnevie in 1999 whereas the author Klaus Rifbjerg was acquitted in 1996. In 2003 the party’s leader Pia Kjærsgaard sued member of Folkebevægelsen mod EU (The People’s Movement against the EU), Karen Sunds, for using the word racist about Kjærsgaard’s politics but ultimately lost the case in the Supreme Court (Rohleder 2003). The number of lawsuits decreased after this court decision.
 - 3) Our concern here is to point out how ideas that refer to a quasi-fascist mindset circulate across a broad political spectrum and have real political consequences that affect large groups of citizens. This by no means suggests that we consider specific parties or politicians in the Nordic welfare-states to be fascist, and certainly not in the sense of the 1930s fascist mass movements. Obviously, such ideas manifest

Canceling an artist, nationalising international solidarity

By way of an introduction, and before summarising this issue in its broad takes on the 1930s today, we want to dwell for a moment on a performance that spotlights the delicacies involved in using the word “racist” in a Danish context and how this problematic points back to quasi-fascist patterns of thinking. The performance *Hvis du er hvid er du min fjende* (*If you are white you are my enemy*) was a contribution by the artist Emil Elg to the exhibition *En blank og vårfrisk dag* (*A shiny, vernal day*) at The Workers Museum in Copenhagen, 2016: A speech was performed by the artist, himself racialised as afro-diasporic in front of a predominantly white audience, in the museum’s historical assembly hall at the exhibition opening. Subsequently, a video documentation of the speech was supposed to be screened in in the physical exhibition for the remaining exhibition period. Elg’s speech addressed the racism inherent in the vocabulary of the social democratic party, and was perceived as controversial, which resulted in the cancellation of his entire presence at the exhibition. It is interesting to bring up Elg’s performance in the context of revisiting the 1930s, because it engages with the historical analogy between xenophobic tendencies in contemporary politics and ideological forms of the 1930s. Also, it has been exposed to the wide-ranging political and social consequences such an engagement can entail, to the extent that it was deprived of its legitimacy and even its material existence as an artwork because the institution for which it was produced refused to provide it with the necessary infrastructural support.⁴

As an externally curated contemporary art exhibition housed by the cultural history museum devoted to the history of the Danish labour movement and taking its collection of socialist flags and banners as a point of departure for reflecting on “contemporary and future symbols of community and solidarity,” the event provided a framework that explicitly invited historical parallels, not least to the 1930s as an essential period in the history of the labour movement with a strong presence in the museum’s collection of artefacts.

Elg’s site-specific and performative work borrowed its form from the political speech. He conducted a comparative analysis of two popular workers’ hymns: One was the May 1st favourite of the Danish Social Democratic Party from which the exhibition title, *A shiny, vernal day*, was borrowed. The song is commonly known by its opening line: “Når jeg ser et rødt flag smælde”, (“When I see a red flag flapping”).⁵ It was negatively compared to “The Internationale” (1871), a song that has been cherished for 150 years by the international workers’ movement. The speech draws explicit parallels between the nationalist imagery of the Danish song, including its ideological context in interwar Europe, and the present rhetoric of the Danish Social Democrats whose concept

themselves differently in a contemporary neo-liberalist world. We do, however, believe that fascism gains power through alliances between conservative, nationalist, populist, and radical-Right ideas and actors. Nationalist and xenophobic affects dominating populist politics may slide into fascism. As professor of Social Science Robert O. Paxton points out: “Fascism in action looks more like a network of relationships than a fixed essence.” (Paxton 2004, 207).

- 4) Even a simple question such as the title of the performance is difficult to resolve since it was never institutionally archived or critically received in the traditional fashion. It remains documented in a YouTube video filed under the heading: “Emil Elg – *Hvis du er hvid er du min fjende* / *Når jeg ser et rødt flag smælde*” (“Emil Elg – *If you are white you are my enemy* / *When I see a red flag flapping*”) while the subsequent publication of the speech in print in the pamphlet *Om racisme* (*On racism*) has been given the minimal title “Tale 3. september” (“Speech September 3rd”).
- 5) The Social Democrats’ battle song was written by Oskar Hansen in 1923 and the melody composed by John Madsen. It was originally published as “Ung flagsang” (“Young flag song”).

of “solidarity” is explicitly called out as both nationalist and racist with reference to recent quotes by its present leader, Mette Frederiksen.



Emil Elg speaking from the podium in The workers museum's assembly hall. September 3rd, 2016. Photo: David Stjernholm

Initially, The Workers Museum had been so pleased with their collaboration with Elg that they had appointed him as artist-in-residence at the museum. In his residency, which was to begin after the exhibition opening, he was to conduct the educational engagement with the exhibition for visiting school children.⁶ But after having experienced Elg's contribution to the exhibition, the museum's board of directors not only removed the work from the exhibition and deleted all traces of Elg from the physical exhibition and its communication material, but also cancelled all future engagements with him, terminated the exhibition's curator Kasper Lyngge Hansen on the spot, and made attempts to prevent Elg from obtaining access to the video documentation of his performance, on the grounds of concern about it constituting a criminal offence, i.e. public libel against social democratic leader Mette Frederiksen. Notwithstanding that Elg's speech in a strikingly literal manner took up an explicit curatorial invitation to historicise contemporary forms of solidarity in relation to the cultural history of the workers' movement – and even directly contextualising the exhibition's title – the surprising official reason for the palpable gesture of censorship provided by

6) In Danish, he was appointed as “huskunstner med tilknytning til skoletjenesten,” an arrangement funded by The Danish Arts Foundation (Ullman 2016).

the museum's director Søren Bak-Jensen was that Elg's contribution did not address the exhibition theme (See Martinsen 2016).

Elg held on to the intellectual property of his own work and managed to seize the video file of his speech and self-publish it on YouTube and to have it published in a printed chapbook.⁷ In the following months no lawsuits were filed, and Elg was never reported to the police. But his work, and a subsequent written defence of his position printed in a national newspaper, were commented upon by a series of Danish politicians, from social democratic candidates at municipality level, over future ministers in the government, to the residing president of the Danish Parliament, and numerous cultural and political commentators, not only repeating a denigration of his piece, calling it bad art, but also questioning Elg's professional status, repeatedly placing a question mark after the word artist (Kjærsgaard 2016, Feyling 2016, Jørgensen 2016, Havskov Hansen 2016). Even what used to be the most explicitly left-wing newspaper, known for taking a sympathetic stand toward critical art practices, *Information*, used lead editorial space to applaud the removal of Elg's piece, calling it both "nonsense" and bad art (Villesen 2016).⁸

More surprising, perhaps, was the rather meagre public announcements of solidarity from colleagues in the art world, and the striking tendency in the announcements that did appear to initially distance themselves from Elg's controversial positioning of Mette Frederiksen as a racist, even if they were arguing against the removal of his work.⁹ With the notable exception of Nazila Kivi's solitary prologue to *Om racisme*, it is difficult to spot much undivided support for Elg's artistic freedom in the contemporaneous Danish public (Kivi 2016). Even the publisher's own introduction to the pamphlet strikes a neutral chord in stressing the importance of discussing Elg's position while reserving the right to disagree with him.

Consequently, although Elg was successful in distributing his work on alternative platforms to prevent its complete erasure, the museum's active de-platforming of it has turned out to be quite efficient. Today, seven years later, only few traces of Elg's piece exist online and serious critical discussions of it are almost absent¹⁰ as are general discussions of his practice as a visual artist.¹¹ Rather, a Google search of the incident will bring to the surface the massive number of commentaries and quotes discrediting the piece and its originator.

7) The video can still be accessed on YouTube (Elg 2016a). The chapbook was published by the small press Nemo and entitled *Om racisme – eller analyse af Ung Flagsang i hvilken det vises at Socialdemokratiets ideologi fungerer inden for en nationalistisk ramme, og at partiets politik er racistisk* (Nemo, 2016). In English: "About racism – or an analysis of *Young Flag Song*, in which it is shown that the ideology of the Social Democratic Party operates within a nationalist frame and that the politics of the party is racist."

8) The paper also printed Elg's response to Villesen's editorial (Elg 2016c) and another column supportive of Elg's position (Center for vild analyse 2016).

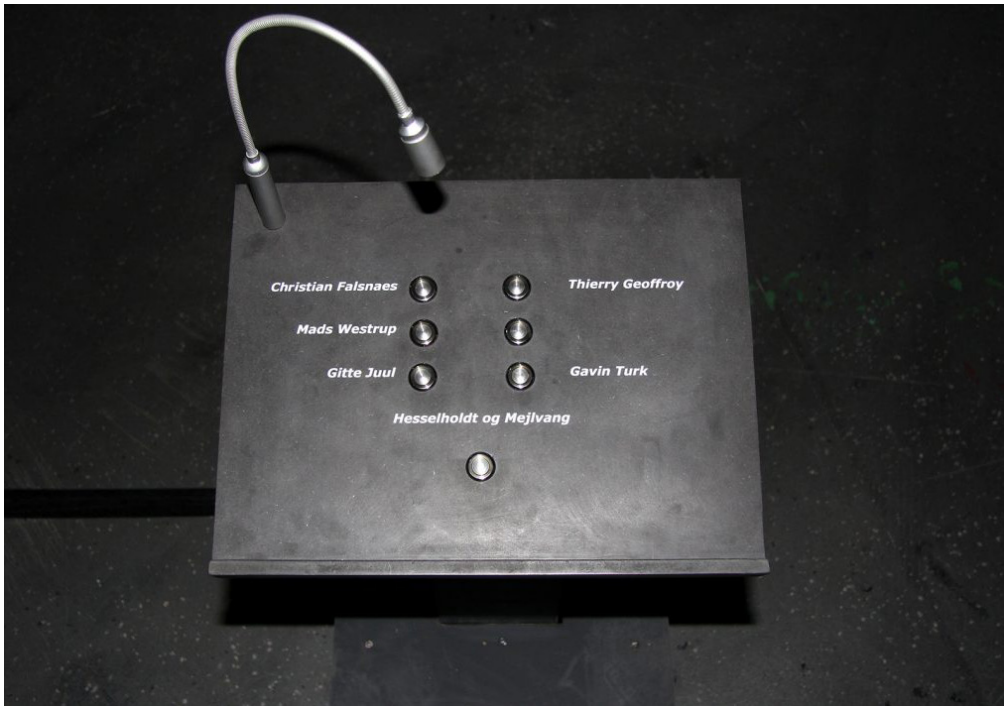
9) This holds true for the two comments published on the online art platform *kunsten.nu*, by the exhibition's terminated curator, visual artist Kasper Lynge Jensen (Jensen 2016) and the visual artist Søren Martinsen (Martinsen 2016). See Danbolt 2020 for further discussion of this tendency.

10) Important exceptions are *Marronage* (2019) which includes a discussion of the chain of events accompanied by an interview with Elg, reading his case into a context of "white fragility" and the challenging working conditions experienced by artists racialised as non-white in the Danish art institutions and Danbolt (2020) which includes an elaborate discussion of Elg's work and its cancellation in an overarching survey and critical reflection on important trends in the Nordic art scene in the 2010s.

11) The long-term consequences the affair may have had for Elg's career as an artist are impossible to determine. The immediate shock, hurt and the anxiety that came with undesired attention from right-wing-internet trolls are described in *Marronage* 2019. Certainly, as an independent artist and art historian at an early career stage, he was in a relatively precarious position when de-platformed by The Workers

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Elg's attachment of the label "racist" to Mette Frederiksen may, on the face of it, appear to be the controversial core of his piece, as it is the one factor repeated in all the commentaries. But this is not the most important analytical manoeuvre performed by Elg's speech. Rather, his analysis aims to challenge, in a general and basic manner, the facile containment of authoritarian and fascist ways of thinking to the past, and to parties of the inter-war period that openly defined themselves as fascist. It is this broader analysis and complexity that adds artistic value and strength to Elg's performance.



Media player in the exhibition *En blank og vårfrisk dag (A shiny vernal day)* with an empty space indicating the removal of Emil Elg's name.
Photo: Søren Martinsen 2016. Originally published on kunstn.nu

It is precisely because his point is not a simplistic denigration of the social democrats or defamation of their leader, that Elg's work differs from another controversial interwar analogy distributed via YouTube and targeting the social democratic movement, albeit from the opposite side of the political spectrum: Namely, the political propaganda film posing as a historical documentary, *Ett folk, ett parti (One people, one party)*, 2018, produced by the Swedish right-wing party Sverigedemokraterna (the Sweden Democrats). What these two very different cultural products have in common is their eagerness to communicate the broad resonance in the 1930s of the ideas we now associate exclusively with the fascist parties. The historical concept of "the people", "folket", has been extensively cleansed in a Danish context – with mainstream parties from left to right designating

Museum and therefore also exposed and vulnerable, both financially, professionally, and personally, to a degree that none of the other parties involved in the affair were.

themselves as “folkepartier” (people’s parties) – but as it is unpacked by both Elg’s artwork and Sverigedemokraterna’s film, it nevertheless holds historical ties to the ideologies of Nazism and fascism, and thus accounts for a common heritage that the contemporary social democratic parties share with these movements: nationalising international solidarity.

But while Elg’s speech analytically highlights some of the rhetorical manoeuvres that were performed by the Danish and the Swedish social democrats alike, in order to focus on the people of a single nation state, *Ett folk, ett parti* proceeds through a shameless exploitation of the corresponding visual iconography between the period’s mass movements from across the political spectrum, i.e., accompanying quotes with eugenic content by social democratic ministers with footage of German Nazi’s marching and images from Nazi concentration camps, in order to convince its viewers about the close ties between the Swedish social democrats and fascist and Nazi parties across Europe.

As suggested by its very name, the ideology of “national socialism” had the ambition to take the international solidarity out of the workers movement, by constructing a form of “socialism” that operated within a nationalist framework. An important part of this ambition was shared by the Nordic social democrats of the 1930s as they were building the national welfare state (in Swedish: “folkhemmet”, the people’s home). A crucial point for Elg, while certainly not for the movie *Ett folk, ett parti*, is that the same ambition is articulated today when the Danish social democrats are explicitly promising to protect their voters (still referred to as “folket” or even more commonly as “the Danes”) from a perceived threat from “the wretched of the earth” that are called upon in “The Internationale.”

Aestheticising politics or politicising art

Multiple critiques of the Swedish film rightly point to its covert propagandistic methods, failing to disclose that the widely suppressed eugenic sympathies of leading social democratic father figures from the 1920s and 30s which it rightly documents, in these decades were broadly shared by members of all parties to the right of the social democrats.

While they are united in their resistance to the compartmentalisation and containment of the ideological freight associated with the fascist parties, showing the resonance of quasi-fascist ideas well into the social democratic parties of the 1930s, the two cultural products must be separated in Walter Benjamin’s terms, when he claims in his afterword to “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” that while fascism covers up alienation through the aestheticisation of politics, turning it into rite and spectacle, “Communism responds by politicizing art.” (Benjamin, 242). Elg clearly takes the position of “political art”, while *Ett folk, ett parti* explicitly “aestheticises politics” while illegitimately claiming a position of historical objectivity and political neutrality. And while the rhetorical operation of *Ett folk, ett parti* seems to be constructing a historical analogy to discredit another historical analogy (namely, the one being put forward by the social democrats in the election campaign that was ongoing at the time of the film’s release and pointing to the fascist roots of Sverigedemokraterna), the point for Elg is by no means an automatic disqualification of the social democrats for the sins of their past but rather countering the simplified version of historical fascism as entirely contained in specific parties at specific historical points.

That this central historical analysis is not directly addressed by any commentators of Elg’s piece hardly indicates that it is unimportant, rather it testifies to the extreme power held by the mainstream interpretation of interwar fascism as a label attachable only to specific demonised historical figures, rather than as a set of beliefs, practices and political tropes that resonated much more broadly across the political spectrum of the 1930s and which have survived to this day,

continually present in decisions to “tolerate lawless treatment of national enemies” (Paxton 2004, 220) – as we continually see in prison camps, detention centres for asylum seekers, and other spaces of exception in the Agambian sense.

Further, Elg’s case is demonstrating cultural theorist Sianne Ngai’s important point that in late capitalist society, the boundaries between aesthetic and non-aesthetic judgments are becoming more and more difficult to maintain (Ngai 2012). And as processes on all levels are powered by – and powering – affective, sensuous, and social relations, it reminds us that attention in the field needs to be directed to the infrastructural conditions supporting – or not supporting – structurally precarised and depraved subjects producing and consuming cultural products. A way for us as scholars of providing company as an epistemological infrastructure to the debilitating cancellation of Elg’s performance criticising nationalism and racism in Denmark, is to browse to the middle of this issue to find the scripted performance “The rematerialisation of trauma: a dialogue on love” by Peter Brandt and Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld. With the reparative dialogue by Brandt and Dirckinck-Holmfeld, harassed due to their practices of critiquing heteronormativity, coloniality and racism, the vulnerability of artists’ rights and lives becomes a diachronic matter, that we parallel to Elg’s can start seeing as a structural delegitimation and debilitation of artists in Denmark.¹²

The 1930s today in this issue

In our interdisciplinary research group, *The 1930s Today*, at the University of Copenhagen we have examined the role of art and culture in the 1930s’ ideological climate, with a special focus on changes in the reception of the 1930s in contemporary art and culture today. In line with Benjamin’s warning that the aestheticisation of politics leads to fascism and war, and should be countered by making art political, the research group in part grew out of the impression that the re-intensification of aestheticised authoritarian politics today calls for an analytical awareness of how the intricate entanglements of politics and aesthetics manifest themselves culturally and politically. The focus on contemporary changes in the way we represent the 1930s and their ideological and aesthetic legacies in art, culture, and politics today reflects an implicit thesis that the continuous negotiations of the decade reflect shifts in the contemporary ideological climate. We were very much aware, though, that the group itself would be part of any possible displacements of the reception of the 1930s, and therefore also invited colleagues with a more historical approach to the decade of the 1930s.

With a project like this, we have been forced to question ourselves about the limitations as well as the benefits of such historical analogies and comparisons. We are aware of the dangers of epistemological violence in the analogy: that the analogy turns into a missed opportunity to face the specific contexts and challenges of a contemporary situation, that analogy can produce historical amnesia when wanting to find sameness between now and then, and thereby repeating or prolonging hegemonical patterns of thinking and of oppression. On the other hand, the reference to the 1930s is more than an analogy, but also part of an ongoing effort to understand the continuous historical consequences of the decade’s authoritarian backlash. As professor of English and Women’s Studies Susan Stanford Friedman has argued, the scholarly task must be to work with the contradiction and incommensurability inherent to comparison in “ways consistent with efforts to move past centrism and instrumentalisms of all kinds.” (Friedman 2011, 43).

12) Here, it is important to note that the persecution of artists also takes place in our neighbouring countries. For example, we have seen the artists behind the Norwegian performance *Ways of Seeing* (2018) and members of the German artists collective Center for Political Beauty being investigated by police and secret services on false or illegitimate grounds, see Enge 2019, Schultz 2019a and 2019b, and Sehl 2019.

In the group, we have traced the entanglements between art and politics in relation to fascisms and authoritarian currents past and present, both in the Nordic region, a European context, and in the US and East Asia, and we have reached out to colleagues beyond a Danish context and to artists and other cultural workers operating beyond the traditional academic institutions. This issue of *Peripeti* presents a selection of the work produced and encountered in our discussions and research. We have kept the periodisation open. In many respects, the 1930s began in the 1920s. The crash on Wall Street in 1929 inaugurated the financial crisis of the 1930s, but the authoritarian backlash also ties back to unresolved conflicts of World War I and the Russian Revolution. The unstable European democracies in the interwar period were disfigured by the emergence of fascism in Italy and its spreading across Europe already during the 1920s. At the other end of the decade, clearly World War II was the culmination of the political and financial crises of the 1930s, but tensions continued into the Cold War and beyond, as reflected in art historian Isabel Wünsche's essay on omissions from the official narrative of the Bauhaus legacy as it was formed in the shadow of the Cold War.

Ane Mette Ruge's photo montages, "Calling Heard over a Great Distance 1-8" reflect precisely on questions of time and duration. They bear witness to the way a Danish popular picture magazine in the late 1930s uncritically reported from a nazified Germany and the way these images travel through the media and resonate into our own time.

The issue opens with Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen's analysis of how Georges Bataille and André Breton tried to negotiate a revolutionary political position beyond both fascism, Stalinism, and bourgeois democracy. A crucial aim in Bataille and Breton's Contre-Attaque group was to develop revolutionary forms capable of unleashing the same affective passion as fascism but to avoid directing it towards violent forms of societal homogeneity. Based on this recognition that "Passion and energy are the material of politics," Bolt Rasmussen argues that we need to develop an affective materialism to support anti-capitalist forms of resistance to contemporary fascism.

Such an affective mobilisation, however, is no easy task when confronted with an authoritarian backlash and a state racism that has already moved all the way into the political centre of liberal democracy as Bolt Rasmussen has argued elsewhere (Bolt Rasmussen, 2021). The unhappy alliances between Holocaust denial, nationalist folklore, and esoteric, neoliberal self-optimisation are provocatively intertwined in the practices of German artist collectives Center for Political Beauty and Frankfurter Hauptschule, examined by Laura Luise Schultz. These artists do not only expose the affective politics of late capitalism, but deliberately try to redirect the affective energy into political interventions.

As previously mentioned, artistic interrogation of the affective economies of liberal democracy may come at a high cost for the individual artists, as the artistic contribution of Peter Brandt and Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld documents.

While the focus on the return of authoritarian movements initially sparked our interest in the 1930s, the focus on forms of resistance has played a major part, too: how to counteract the aestheticisation of politics, according to Benjamin's chiasm, yet knowing that there is no aesthetic 'outside', no counterstrategy that cannot also be used by repressive forces. A substantial part of the present issue addresses the re-actualisation of forms of activism based on collectivist traditions. For example, the artist collective Forsøgsscenen (1929-32) is examined by Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt through the lens of production aesthetics – a redistributive, political and institution-forming practice, seeing artistic production as the practice of a social idea.

Professor of Theatre Studies, Matthias Warstat, has been invited to reflect upon the contradictions between politics and aesthetics along the fractured line between activist art and political activism. Based on his extensive research into agitprop and related forms of activist theatre as well as performative forms of community building in the interwar German workers' movement, Warstat relates the challenges – and pitfalls – of contemporary political theatre to the contentions of the political theatre of the 1930. Discussions regarding how best to engage the relevant audience and avoid imposing upon them or in other ways pushing them away, are still pressing questions for interventionist practices today, which the agitprop theatre around 1930 helped negotiate if not solve.

Looking back on the 1930s from the position of today's aesthetic practices can thus feed into an extended vocabulary for artistic self-organisation: Agitprop, proletkult, and interventionist art practices are applied in recent struggles against gentrification in Berlin, as we get to know about in the interview by Karen Vedel with artists behind the street opera *Wem gehört Lauratibor?* (*Who owns Lauratibor?*), as well as in the essay by one of the directors of the street opera, Konstanze Schmitt.

The Brechtian *Lehrstück* is revisited in Tania Ørums article on the performance *Work Bitch!*. The piece by Danish author Ida Marie Hede starts out from the movement to free Britney Spears from her father's custody and explores a longing for liberation in a society of interiorised competition and stress. Ørum evokes the *Lehrstück* as a model for how to organise resistance collectively when faced with an overwhelmingly individualised culture.

Similarly, gender and sexual politics are addressed in Marianne Ølholm's, Gunhild Borggren's, and Yoshiko Shimada's contributions on gender transitioning and abuse of women in wartime Japan, as body politics tend to be inevitably intertwined with the widespread focus on eugenics and racial purity of the 1930s based on pseudo-scientific ideas and assumptions that reached far beyond National Socialism and into present-day cosmetic medicine and popular culture.

If the individual contributions each in their way address the risk of the analogical exercise – and the agitated responses it generates – to congeal into clichés and other hardened patterns of thought, collapsing nuances and stimulating divisiveness, then we hope that they may also convince of the significance of continuing to do this work, despite its implied crux. What we aspire to do with this issue, and with our work in the group, is to follow Susan Friedman's instruction, as mentioned above, to work with forms of comparison that “resist the politics of domination and otherness.” (Friedman 2011, 43). The importance of supplying such epistemological infrastructures is further stressed by the case of Emil Elg's cancellation and similar cases of defamation of artists and activists in our immediate proximity. Such cases indicate how the strong commitment from contemporary political authorities to contain certain patterns of thought and action into the historically specific frame of the 1930s is instrumental and oppressive with very real consequences for structurally precarised subjects in our societies. In such cases, the active censorship of the analogy proves the analogy right.

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