"Electronic Music from East Switzerland (via Germany)? Intermediality in Peter Weber's novel *Die melodielosen Jahre* (2007)"

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Abstract

In this chapter, I undertake an intermedial analysis of the Swiss author Peter Weber's 2007 novel, *Die melodielosen Jahre*, published by Suhrkamp. I examine Weber's contribution to German language musico-centric literature, which he made after the boom in so-called *Popliteratur* of the late 1990s, and from a place outside the metropole of electronic music's nominally German abode. I show not only how Weber thematises electronic music in the novel, but also how he seeks to use musical principles in crafting his prose. All the while, I question how Weber relates himself and his prose to the hegemonic German electronic music scene, and to musico-literary prose by German Suhrkamp colleagues, such as Andreas Neumeister, Rainald Goetz and Thomas Meinecke.

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Introduction

In a 2015 book, *Into the Groove: Popular Music and Contemporary German Fiction*, I conducted an enquiry into what I called "musico-centric literature" in recent German-language writing (Hurley 2015). Rather than discussing this literature simply in terms of the commonly used genre, *Popliteratur*, I was specifically interested in literature that had a particular connection to popular music.[1] *Popliteratur* was more of a portmanteau term and despite what an Anglophone audience might think, a link to popular music is not a given: The pop in *Popliteratur* was typically more about "Pop Art" than "popular music." Moreover, literature with other perhaps less obvious links to the milieu of popular music was not necessarily conceived of as *Popliteratur*. Musicians-cum-authors like Sven Regener (most famous for 2001's *Herr Lehmann*) initially strenuously avoided thematising music. But they were musico-centric in that these musician-authors were schooled in popular music markets and corresponding ways of self-presentation, and carried that habitus into the literary domain (Hurley 2013). I delineated a boom in musico-centric German-language literature roughly between the mid 1990s and the mid-2000s. Much of this literature was written by Germans—as opposed to Austrians or Swiss—and much, although not all of it, referenced electronic dance music (EDM) in some way. Some authors simply thematised EDM, whereas others deployed intermediality in a deeper sense, in that they borrowed, or attempted to borrow from musical structures and principles in the way they wrote.[2] The musician and author Thomas Meinecke was a case in point; he has a 40-year career as a musician with Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle (FSK), and an equally illustrious one as a Suhrkamp author. He has both played a variant of electronic music, and also thematised it in novels, including *Hellblau* (2001) and *Musik* (2004). Meinecke has spoken of EDM "giving wings" to his

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[1] For studies of *Popliteratur*, see eg Ernst 2001, Ullmaier 2001, Baßler 2002, Jung 2002, Arnold and Schäfer 2003, Frank 2003, Kendel 2005, Paulokat 2006, Seiler 2006, Gleba and Schuhmacher 2007, Krause 2015. For another study interested in the links between popular music and *Popliteratur*, see Tillmann 2013.

[2] On intermediality, see e.g. Wolf 1999, Rajewsky 2002.

writing, in a similar way that jazz gave wings to Beat writing in the 1950s, and the same could be said for many authors of musico-centric literature of the 1990s and 2000s (Meinecke 2004a). Electronic music was certainly motivating the most innovative and deeply intermedial approaches to extended literary writing—what I call "Techno-Lit"—as opposed to other more nostalgic musico-centric writing from this era, such as Matthias Politycki's *Weiberroman* (1997), Frank Goosen's *Liegen Lernen* (2001), or in the Anglophone context Nick Hornby's foundational *High Fidelity* (1995). These latter books tended to be a "nostalgische verklärte Milieuschilderung" (nostalgic, misty-eyed portrayal of a milieu) as the critic Hubert Spiegel opined (1999: 5). They elaborated on popular music at a more thematic level, to show how popular music acted as a soundtrack for a particular generation's past, and how it could operate as an effective index for memory.

By electronic dance music, I am referring—as the German journalist Ulf Poschardt did in 1995—to two main contemporary genres; the disco-related house music and the more radical, usually wordless, techno. But EDM was more than just a type of music. In the late 1980s and 1990s, it was also associated with a euphoric mode of consumption; the "rave" dance-party. In the middle European context EDM was very much part of the famous dance-party cum street festival and demonstration, the Love Parade, held annually in Berlin between 1989 and 2003 and which attracted very large numbers of participants in the 1990s (Nye 2009). Importantly, some discourse about electronic music has in the last twenty-five years identified it as having a particular connection to Germany.[3] Although the years after unification caused many to rethink what it meant to be German, and there was a normalisation of nation talk, this is not necessarily to say that the German-language discourse about electronica was overtly nationalist in its tenor. But by the 1990s, electronic music was

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[3] For an overview of techno in Germany and its cultural significance there, see e.g. Robb 2002.

something with which many younger Germans could proudly engage and relate. It had a lineage which was thought to be uncontaminated by the Nazi past. This was summed up by Wolfgang Seidel (born 1949) when he said in a documentary about the key 1970s-1980s electro-pop band, Kraftwerk, that electronic music was so attractive to his generation of Germans because it did not have a connection to the tainted past (quoted in Chrome Dreams 2008). By the 1990s it did have a newer German past, especially through a genealogy involving Karlheinz Stockhausen, Krautrock/kosmische Musik from the 1960s/1970s, and Kraftwerk's electro-pop from the 1970s/1980s. Poschardt wrote about that genealogy in his influential book, *DJ Culture* (1995). EDM also prompted the editors of the German popular culture journal, *Testcard*, in 1996, to analyse anew the links between popular music and Germanness.[4] It is important to note that some of the 1990s attention also came from abroad. For example, there was Englishman Julian Cope's *Krautrocksampler* (1995), which re-examined the Krautrock/kosmische Musik genre from a fan's perspective. EDM also had a German present, in that it was being produced and consumed in Germany—at events like the Love Parade and elsewhere—as it was in other parts of the world. Again, this is not to say that discourse about contemporary German electronic music was necessarily national in its frame. For example, an important early (1993) techno compilation from the Berlin nightclub and label Tresor made much of a would-be "Berlin Detroit […] Techno Alliance". Approbation from beyond was important, including calling on the African-American Detroit techno pioneer Derrick May's oft-repeated remark that Detroit techno was like the "[African-American funk musician] George Clinton and Kraftwerk caught in an elevator with only a sequencer to keep them company" (quoted in Rubin 2009). In Thomas Meinecke's music and novels, he also thought about and recorded international (or transnational) electronic music. This included the 2004 *First Take then Shake* album—recorded by FSK and then

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[4] "Inland" *Testcard* 2 (1996).

mixed by the African-American house producer Anthony 'Shake' Shakir—and also *Hellblau*, which reflects on networks and musical connections between Germany and African-America, among many other things (Hurley 2012).

What, however, did it mean for a Swiss author such as Peter Weber to be engaging in EDM-influenced German-language musico-centric literature, from a threefold outside position: From outside Germany; from outside any privileged African-American/German subject position, and from outside the time frame we might typically associate with *Popliteratur*? In answering this question, I explore layers of intermediality in Weber's most recent, 2007 novel *Die melodielosen Jahre* (hereafter *DmJ*). First, how does it reflect on electronic music and the would-be German nexus at a thematic level? Second, how does it engage with electronic musical principles at a more structural level.[5] It is easiest to deal with these questions separately, but because reflection about music also flows into reflection about how music affects (the German) language, and the novel then models these effects, layers of intermediality are actually interwoven. In relation to structural intermediality, how does *DmJ* compare with the Techno-Lit undertaken by Weber's predecessors at Suhrkamp, the German writers Thomas Meinecke, Rainald Goetz and Andreas Neumeister? I argue that Weber engages in a type of "minor" musico-centric literature. His writing is more distant from the earlier, aggressively affirmative period of engagement with EDM, that we might associate with Rainald Goetz's *Rave* (1998). It is cooler in tone, and more reflective about what EDM's implications are for writing in the German language. This is something to which he is, I suggest, especially attuned because of his identity as a Swiss novelist and spoken word artist writing in High German. Weber is ultimately also less committed to EDM and what it stands for in language than some of his German predecessors, partly because he is writing

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[5] For an outline of different types of intermediality, see e.g. Wolf 1999, Rajewsky 2002, 2004, Hurley 2015.

from a perspective where EDM has become ever more historic. And partly because, as a Swiss writer, he did not have to contend with the anxious cultural pessimism with which many of his German peers had to. One might argue that because the opposition was less, the embrace was also less.

Introducing Weber

Peter Weber (born 1968 in Wattwil in the Toggenburg area of St Gallen canton), is a good ten years younger than his Suhrkamp colleagues Goetz (born 1954), Meinecke (born 1955) and Neumeister (born 1959). After secondary school (in 1987) in the east of Switzerland, he moved to Zürich. Weber's first major work, the novel *Der Wettermacher*, was published six years later in 1993. Significantly, he has worked with musicians, both as a Jew's Harp (Maultrommel) player, but mostly in performances combining his spoken words with music accompaniment; notably with the Swiss improv string quartet, Die Firma, but also with the multi-instrumentalist and electronic musician, Denis Aebli. This genre is more than just a simple public reading. It has a long history tying in the jazz and poetry movement of the 1950s, recordings like novelist Hubert Fichte's in the 1960s with a beat group, as well some of the slam poetry activities since the 1990s. These activities have very much had a life in the German-speaking world.[6] This background is critical to the intermediality of Weber's published texts. As *DmJ* puts it, standard public readings in German have a "monotonen Leseweise, wie sie das Deutsche zuläßt und mitunter verlangt" (monotonous mode of delivery that German permits and occasionally demands) and the reader's posture tends to be "hinuntergebückt" (bent-over, 154). This was a point made by others of his generation who embraced poetry slams as a way of re-vivifying the performative aspects of German literary culture (see e.g. Neumeister and Hartges, 13-16). By its nature any thoroughgoing reading *with*

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[6] For an overview, see e.g. Ullmaier 2001.

music is intermedial; it is interested in the interplay between word and sound and what occurs in the combination and interstices between the two forms. It requires an attention to how words sound, and how a reader can vary musical qualities like tempo, pitch, timbre, alliteration, and so on. And it allows for using aural dimensions to both accentuate, as well as subtract from a written text's semantics. When this is improvised, as in the jazz and poetry genre to which Weber's performances with Die Firma were an heir, the attention is all the greater because of the way participants must listen attentively to their colleagues, and react on their feet.

Weber has published four novels so far, and all of them are set at least partly in Switzerland. The first two have even been called "postmoderne Heimatromane" (postmodern Heimat novels) (Fessmann 2003). Weber has also been recognised by German reviewers as someone from whom a German reader can learn much about Switzerland (Auffermann 1999). This Swissness is a significant aspect that also contextualises his take on EDM as something that *is and is not* linked with Germany and with the German language. Significantly, the early novels also explore some of the themes and musico-centric techniques he developed in *DmJ*. *Der Wettermacher* (1993) contains reflections, among other things, on the move from analogue (typewriter) to digital (computer) in 1990, and how this modified not only the writing process but also the text itself. *DmJ* extends on the idea of epochal digital change, and its impact on writing; the physicality of typing a text into an early computer alters the "rhythmische Gefüge" (rhythmic structure) of the text, for example (149). Weber's second novel, *Silber und Salbader* (1999), a love story between two musicians, is quite aurally attuned and musico-centric. It is set in the Limmattal, which is portrayed as being in "der geräuschreichsten Gegend der Schweiz" (the noisiest area in Switzerland, cover blurb). Numerous reviewers noted how *Silber und Salbader* and its successors worked with aural

qualities such as onomatopoeia, free association and alliteration (Baureithel 1999, Hillgruber 1999, Kunisch 1999). By Weber's third novel, *Bahnhofsprosa* (2003), the aural aspect was influencing the structure of the text. It was conceived as a listening in to the voices of a railway station hall, and a type of re-mixing of those voices. Suhrkamp's marketing of Weber's novels between 1999-2003 (and again in 2007) was of a piece with its marketing of Goetz, Meinecke, and Neumeister and indicated the cachet that attached to musico-centric literature during the *Popliteratur* era.[7] Characteristically, Suhrkamp advertised *DmJ* thus: "Was immer dem Autor unter die Feder kommt, wird zu Musik" (whatever the author's pen touches becomes music".[8] *Bahnhofsprosa* was important to *DmJ* for another reason too. The book foregrounds the train motif that recurs in Weber's oeuvre, especially in *DmJ*. Weber and his semi-autobiographical protagonists travel a lot by train, initially within Switzerland, and then through Germany and beyond. The train is a distinctive sounding thing evoking repetition, which is important not just to the topic of EDM, but is a key theme to the whole of *DmJ*. In the musical context, Weber's European train travel also brings to mind Kraftwerk's famous 1977 album *Trans Europa Express*. That work, with its combination of German lyrics with trans-European locations as well as its sonic evocation of motion, presages the German-but-not-only-German identity of EDM and repetition in *DmJ*.

Die melodielosen Jahre and the idea of melody

The 13-chapter, a-chronological novel is not easy to summarise in the sense of a sustained narrative arc or psychological character development. It has a Swiss writer-protagonist who

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[7] See e.g. Suhrkamp's author webpage for Weber:
https://www.suhrkamp.de/autoren/peter_weber_5203.html?d_view=preise

[8] Suhrkamp's webpage for *DmJ*: https://www.suhrkamp.de/buecher/die_melodielosen_jahre-peter_weber_41774.html

was born in 1968, the same year as Weber, and who shares a number of the author's features, notably his performances with an improvising string quartet. But the novel has a shifting point of view, and the protagonist is referred to variously as the third-person Oliver, 'O', or "Mr Please", and who also features as a first-person narrator. Not terribly much happens to the protagonist, but we do read a lot about his past and present travels, and a few episodes from his life such as childhood memories, holding his father's eulogy, or a love affair. There are also sketches of texts the protagonist half conceives. The novel has been summed up by the Swiss critic Roman Bucheli (2007) as part "moderner Reiseroman" (modern travel novel) and part "Sprachroman" (language novel). But it is also very much a reflection on the music of 1980s-2000s. EDM predominates, but there are also reflections on what it was like to be socialised by an older sibling's record collection in the 1970s for example, as well as on the genre of free improvised music, with which Weber was himself well acquainted.

As a modern travel novel, *DmJ* is not so much about places the protagonist visits; namely Frankfurt am Main (several times), Istanbul, Southern Italy, Marseille, Prague, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Rostock, London, Warsaw and others. It is frequently mainly about being in motion, mostly on a motorised conveyance—a boat, an airplane, and especially a train— and the patterns of repetition one encounters in the process, and by which the passenger is influenced. On a train for example, the traveller is in synch with repetitive mechanical actions, be it the train's motion over the welded tracks, or the rotating windmills he sees out the window. But the novel also thematises the regularity of a train station's "Stundentakt" (hourly pattern, 149). There are other types of repetitions too, for example the neatly ordered rows of plantings past which the train flits. Weber makes a point of bringing these various evocations of repetition into proximity with other (sonically) repetitive things, for example with an alarm clock Oliver considers purchasing at a market in Istanbul. Repetition is a vital

theme in the novel, and it is important to note that it is not predominantly freighted with anxiety or distrust. Repetition is key to Weber's notion of the predominant—and for his protagonist pleasurable—music of the 1990s, EDM, with its insistent 4/4 beat. But EDM is indexical of the zeitgeist in a world at the saddle between analogue and digital processes. *DmJ* associates repetition with allied ideas of monotony, syncopation, and the title's concept of "melody-lessness." These notions have social implications, but they also bring with them important implications for language and the writing process.

In musical terms, melody designates "pitched sounds arranged in musical time in accordance with given cultural conventions and constraints" (Ringer n.d.). Hence melody involves ideas of linearity, horizontal sequence and development. A melody is often foregrounded in a piece of music. It is memorable for this reason, and also because it can be reproduced in a different key and remains recognisable. Melody-lessness is very much germane to many instances of techno. Indeed, Philip Tagg identified in a key article in 1994 that techno involved the dominance of "ground" and a corresponding loss of "figure." As opposed to other types of popular music, techno involved "so little tune and so much accompaniment," which was true of a music that in its extremer forms was stripped of melody or tune but focussed instead on repetitive beats and electronic sound textures. But the notion also signified a different attitude amongst EDM's adherents to the individual/figure, as opposed to the collective (Tagg 1994: 216). Weber returns to this idea of melody (and melody-lessness) at different times, but we can already see how melody-lessness is replicated in a novel which lacks a prominent protagonist (figure) engaging in a clear, sequential chain of events.

The Germanness of repetition?

In a context where repetition is everywhere, and where we know that many were associating repetitive EDM with Germany, how is this nexus represented in the novel? This can be summed up in a "German but not only German" stance. German technology is casually mentioned as being behind some of the repetition the protagonist encounters: For example the train lines to Asia were laid by Germans; in Istanbul he also observes a German turnstile. And much—but not all—of Oliver's time is spent in Germany, including on its iconic ICE trains. It is also the case that many of Oliver's formative experiences of repetitive EDM occur in Germany: For example, he experiences a significant "Tonuswechsel" (key change, 31) in his life when working as a civic writer in residence in Frankfurt am Main and making a point of experiencing the city—and presumably its renowned EDM culture. Likewise, shortly after the *Wende*, he travels to Berlin and participates in a large dance party there. This is an awakening and the novel refers to activities subsequent to his own sonic *Wende* as being after the protagonist's year zero. EDM is not restricted to Germany; indeed he is first introduced to it by American musicians in Zurich, and later experiences it at a nightclub in Warsaw. But Germany is an epicentre and *DmJ* reflects on this perception from abroad too: "Deutschland wurde aus der Ferne als treibende Kraft wahrgenommen: elektronisches Hauptstromland" (From abroad, Germany was perceived as the driving force: the country with the electronic head stream, 59). Coincidentally or otherwise, this remark also vaguely suggests the key German EDM precursor, Kraftwerk.

Whilst the notion of repetition is therefore partly German by association with technology or with EDM in Germany—and with the German language, as we will see—it is not wholly so. For example, the protagonist is a "Kind des helvetischen Gleichtaktes" (child of the Helvetic even tempo, 150) and he first observes train repetitions in Switzerland itself. Another of the novel's divergences from his German colleagues at Suhrkamp lies in how Weber pulls in

repetition from the natural world, particularly from animal sounds like a cicada's cyclical chirping, as well as other more archaic forms of repetition, for example from a Jew's harp. This universalizes repetition beyond the mechanical and digital world, and extends it beyond any German nexus; indeed it gives *DmJ* an occasionally provincial, Swiss feel. Or as the novel approvingly puts it in a different context, "das Zusammenspiel von kleiner und grosser Welt, von Landschaft und Stadt […] die Wichtigkeit des Sauerstoffaustausches, wechselseitiger Belüftungen" (the interplay of the small and wide worlds, of landscape and city […] the importance of respiration, mutual airing, 115). The novel is fairly ambiguous about Switzerland, though. Initially, Oliver spends much more of his time outside Switzerland, even though the novel does return there. He is occasionally quite critical of his fellow Swiss Germans, too. On a Swissair plane, he puts in earplugs so he does not have to listen to their smug, possessive utterances. Lulled by melodious string music they fall into a self-satisfied sleep, whereas Oliver is attuned to the melody-less noise of the jet engines and cannot. He gladly gets mistaken for a German by the Albanian man sitting next to him, and elsewhere he seems equally comfortable being mistaken for a Czech, a Scot, or an Austrian.

A certain distance from the stolidly and traditional Swiss is also enacted in the passage about the eulogy 'O' delivers for his father. His father was both an architect/builder and an organic farmer in East Switzerland, and hence very much of the land. O had left East Switzerland many years earlier, and fairly easily takes leave from his father now; At this point O becomes "leer, melodielos, *frei*" (empty, melody-less, *free*, 29, emphasis added). The Father is indeed called at one point a "Vatermelodie" (father-melody) and represents a certain staid sequence or "Lebenslauf" (chronological resume, 29, 27). After the *Vatermelodie* falls silent, there is a metaphorical *drone*—i.e. another form of sonic repetition—with which the son seems comfortable. In this pregnant passage, there is a chain of equivalence between the deceased

father, O's home territory, and the idea of melody and a sequential life. The notion of repetition—sonically referenced by a drone—represents liberation from the (father)figure in a concrete as well as abstract sense. This marks a polar opposite from Freud's influential ideas in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" that repetition is mainly associated with compulsion and unfreedom (Freud 1975). Somewhat later, Oliver also takes leave from what he identifies as the "jahrhundertealte helvetische Idyllenbewirtschaftung" (centuries-old Helvetic management of idylls, 114). And yet Oliver is not universally opposed to the Swiss either. From a distance he even develops a peculiar desire to visit Switzerland and see it as a British tourist would. He gets more interested in Switzerland when he can view it from afar, as if through a telescope. And as noted, Oliver does return to Switzerland, as does the novel itself. Its last three chapters revolve around East Switzerland and Lake Zurich and almost perform a fresh (ironic?) idyllic paean to these locations. This touches on the idea of a partial retreat from the initial embrace of (German) repetition and a partial return to (Swiss) melody; a point to which I will return.

Repetition, melody-lessness and freedom/unfreedom

Notions of repetition and *Melodielosigkeit* are represented as something that is inextricably linked to the zeitgeist, in a way that other forms of music, especially free improvisation, are not. More than this, "Die Musik ist allem voraus" (music is the vanguard).[9] That is to say repetition in music augurs repetition elsewhere in life. So repetition is to some extent inescapable, the novel suggests. But EDM and *Melodielosigkeit* also represent a series of positive freedoms for the Swiss protagonist. We have already seen how repetition represented liberation from a (father)figure. In a way that is less aggressively affirmative

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[9] Suhrkamp's webpage for *DmJ*: https://www.suhrkamp.de/buecher/die_melodielosen_jahre-peter_weber_41774.html

than Goetz's *Rave, DmJ* also refers to the drug-taking associated with EDM, and how that combination can unlock audio-hallucination and oceanic, bodily experiences—in the Berlin dance party experience, for example. This is liberating for the young protagonist not only in its own terms, but also for a person who has been schooled in the paradoxical constraints of free improvisation, especially its restrictive edict against any form of repetition. The freedom of repetition also has to do with forgetting. Indeed, forgetting is intrinsically linked to repetitive dance music: "Vergiß, sagt jede Synkope zur Baßpauke. Vergiß! Vergiß! Vergiß!" (Forget, says every syncopation to the bass drum. Forget! Forget! Forget!, 64). That too can be liberating, and open up new forms of expression, including with the written word. These themes are shared with other Suhrkamp Techno-Lit, especially Goetz's *Rave*. However, there is a distinction in attitude between *DmJ* and *Rave*, as well as Neumeister's *Gut Laut*. Those two earlier novels had more to contend with, because they were closer in time to the upswing in EDM in the 1990s, and to the concomitant anxieties it precipitated, especially in German critics. German writers necessarily had to contend with a reprise of Adorno's worried critique of the culture industry, or with concerns about repetition compulsions, or about crowds and their proto-fascist potential.[10] The idea of *forgetting* is also one that was inherently suspect in post-1968 Germany. Goetz's response was to be aggressively affirmative and apodictic; to thumb his nose at the critics, as it were; whereas Neumeister's was to use disarming word play and a wry tone. For example, when referring to the Munich equivalent of the Love Parade, he made a word play: "Dies ist kein Marsch zur Feldherrnhalle hin, sondern ein Umzug von der Feldherrnhalle weg." (This is not a march towards the *Feldherrnhalle*, but rather a procession away from the *Feldherrnhalle*:

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[10] See generally Hurley 2015: Chapter 4.

Neumeister 1996: 15.)[11] As a Swiss writer, and as a later writer, Weber evidently did not need to openly contend with the spectre of National Socialism when thinking about EDM.

Although repetition and its corollary forgetting are shorn of the anxiety about the German past in Weber's novel, they are not always positively connotated.   Rather, *DmJ* makes a series of matter-of-fact observations about repetition's negative dimensions. A windmill's repetition can be "gnadenlos" (merciless, 8); an alarm clock has a "strikt[es] Metronom" (strict metronome, 13) and its imperative to "wach auf" (wake up, 13) can be unpleasant. More generally, repetition involves "Zäune aus Ausrufezeichen, Pallisaden" (fences made from exclamation marks, [defensive] palisades, 87). Or even "Folgezwang. Geheiß" (coercion to follow. Behest, 104). In Istanbul repetition from a bass drum also drowns out "arabisierende Melodien" (Arabianising [sic] melodies, 14). So repetition has restrictive and even aggressive dimensions too. It can confine an individual, as well as take over space and flatten difference. This ambivalence towards repetition is also carried over into the novel's formal "musical" experiments with repetitive language.

"Lingua rubata"; sounding out intermediality

One of the novel's key themes is how repetitive music, and repetition generally, impacts on language and meaning. This is also a principle that Weber tests out in his novel. At a high level that may not differ greatly from his Suhrkamp colleagues, especially Neumeister. But whereas they concentrated on undertaking their repetition experiments and mainly saved sustained metareflection about it to paratexts like interviews, I discern a greater degree of

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[11] Munich's *Feldherrnhalle* (field marshalls' hall) is not only linked to the general 19th century history of German militarism. It was also linked specifically to National Socialism, being an important site of confrontation between National Socialist marchers and Bavarian police during Hitler's first (failed) "Beer Hall Putsch" in 1923.

reflexivity within Weber's novel itself. *DmJ* makes a series of key—but overall ambivalent—statements about this complex issue. "Eilende Musik legt die Beete vor, in die die Sprache fällt" (hurried music lays down furrows into which language falls, 31) suggests that language is trapped by music-inspired repetition (31). However another statement, "der Einton und wie er Sinn und Silben tanzen macht" (the monotone and how it makes sense and syllables dance, 79), indicates a more playful, joyous aspect to repetition's effect on language, albeit one that obfuscates meaning. Later, Weber writes about a "Lingua rubata: der aussersprachliche Raum, der entsteht, wenn reine Wiederholung regiert" (Lingua rubata: the extra-linguistic dimension that emerges when pure repetition reins, 144). The notion of a "lingua rubata" is a variation on the Italian music term, rubato, which designates where a performer's individual phrasing is at odds with the strict metre of a piece: The performer "robs" a fraction of a measure and gives it to a particular note. Lingua rubata carries an appropriately ambiguous semantic. Literally it conveys the idea of *robbed* language, but it also signifies the gain in freedom and expressivity that arises, as in rubato music, when the performer alters phrasing. This idea of *lingua rubata* is a key one addressing the ambiguity of EDM-intermediality in literature. In essence it is central to the EDM-inflected creative writing practiced in other Suhrkamp Techno-Lit novels. What Weber adds is an extra level of reflection, and one that is partly informed by his positionality in relation to the German language.

Within the text Oliver is portrayed as a language outsider *due to his Swissness*: "[lingua rubata] sollte sogar euch Schweizer beschäftigen, nicht wahr?" ([Lingua rubata] ought to even be of interest to you Swiss, shouldn't it?, 144) is posed as an offhand question. But in fact the novel demonstrates how Swissness causes an ear for the sonic distinctions between young (Germanic) versus old (Romance) languages, involving their differing cadences,

rhythms, and emotional freights. Swissness also demands an attention to the differences between spoken Swiss-German dialect and the written Hochdeutsch (in which *DmJ* is written). The latter is a language which is both (one of) one's own, and that of a powerful and culturally distinct neighbour to the north. This positionality is heightened by the fact that Weber is published by a German house such as Suhrkamp.   In other words, because it is inherently multilingual and because it is outside the German majority, Swissness offers a peripheral but privileged place from which to observe the impacts of repetition on German language and meaning, and to experiment and play with the effects.   One might even speak of a type of minor positionality and literature, to borrow Deleuze's and Guattari's idea advanced in their discussion of the German language used by Kafka, as a Prague Jew; that is the idea of being "like a foreigner in one's own language" (quoted and translated in Dosse 2010: 243).[12] But there is also a belatedness—or to put it another way maturity and nuance— to Weber's text, including in the way it engages principles of repetition, and then is free enough to partly retreat from them.

In terms of specifics, *DmJ* borrows three principles from EDM culture, and from music more generally, all of which invoke the idea of repetition in some way. First, there is a mixing of textual elements in the same way that a deejay might "cross fade" between two music tracks. Second, there is a gesture towards the vertical dimension inherent in music, where several strands can concurrently exist in (dis)harmony. Finally, there is the manifold use of micro- and macro- repetition.

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[12] The original is in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une literature mineure*. Paris: Minuit, 1975: 29.

Mixing: In deejay culture since the 1970s and especially with EDM, a deejay is attentive to the ways that two distinct music tracks are sequentially arranged. Whilst a cut can be abrupt, and hip-hop deejays use the technique of scratching, that is a montage that draws jarring sonic attention to the juxtaposition, beat mixing is also a central practice. With beat mixing, during the cross-over (or cross-fade) period, sonic elements of the first track, which is being mixed out, can also be heard as the new track is being mixed in. Thomas Meinecke is an experienced musician, deejay and writer, and he uses this mixing technique in much of his writing (see e.g. Feiereisen 2011). In *DmJ* Weber mixes to a lesser extent than Meinecke, but he does engage in a little "überblenden" (fading out/superimposition, 12) for example where he carries a particular word or theme from one passage to the next, which is otherwise disconnected. For example, the name of the boat "*Istanbul"* in one episode becomes the setting of the next episode (12). But this effect also occurs sonically: The sound of a ship's horn is echoed, or repeated, in the next passage in the sound of an alarm clock.

Thinking a chord: At one point, *DmJ* reflects on how EDM and the repetition inherent in it involves the paradox of "Fern! Jetzt! Fern! Jetzt!" (faraway! now! faraway! now!, 84). This is one of several similar juxtapositions of words with opposing meaning, the repetition of which drives the paradox home. These pairings link up different points on the time axis, and have to do with the perception of time when listening to EDM. Minimalist music, including much EDM, has been defined as "non-narrative and a-teleological" (Mertens 1983: 17). Instead it evokes "duration and stasis, without beginning or end" (Ron Rosenbaum quoted in Mertens 1983: 89). Indeed, EDM exhibits what has been called "moment time" (Jonathan Kramer) and confronts the listener with a deepened sense of immediacy (quoted in Frith 1998: 149). (This is also one reason why EDM involves an imperative to forget.) This immediacy is a feature that is also key to Rainald Goetz's writing in *Rave* and elsewhere

(Schumacher 2003). With *DmJ* the faraway/future collapses into the now. But the (almost) simultaneity of the faraway and the now also addresses one enduring challenge of intermediality that blends writing with musical principles. In essence, whereas much music readily operates on a horizontal (melodic, rhythmic) as well as vertical (harmonic) axis, and chords are quite possible in music, verticality is less easy to approximate in a text. And yet, the pairing *and repetition* of fern/jetzt almost achieves a vertical dimension, that is saying two different things at the one time. A later example reveals the cost, however: "Regressiv ist progressiv ist regressiv ist progressiv. Vorwärts, rückwärts, marsch!" (regressive is progressive is regressive is progressive. Forwards, backwards, march!, 120). Here the repeated (almost) simultaneity of opposing ideas causes meaning to be cancelled out, a *lingua rubata* idea that *DmJ* also reflects on. The larger point is that repetition can be anti-teleological and at odds with ideas of traditional literary narrative. A text that is simultaneously marching both forwards and backwards might approximate repetitive music, but it militates against a linear narrative. And that is also the case in *DmJ*: Oliver's travel episodes and reflections do not follow a linear chronology, and the reader very much bears the responsibility of finding a coherent connection between them.

Verbal minimalism: Earlier in the 2000s, Andreas Neumeister had observed in an interview that "[w]as bei Tanzmusik funktioniert, Endlosschleifen mit minimalen Variationen, funktioniert in der Literatur nur auf kürzeren Distanzen." (That which works in dance music—endless loops with minimal variations—only works over a shorter distance in literature. Quoted in Rüdenauer 2001: 26). Like Neumeister's *Gut laut*, Weber's text tests out repetition at all sorts of different levels, and we get a clear sense of the playfulness that repetitive music ushered in to experimental literature. There are multiple variations of a particular theme; for example different passages each commonly titled "Tonuswechsel" (key

change, 31) or "Tausend Jahre" (thousand years, 71). At a more micro level, the text uses

certain repetitive phrases such as "wach auf, wach auf" (wake up, wake up) or "kauf mich,

kauf mich" (buy me, buy me), and these also re-emerge at different intervals (17).   At an

even more micro level, words and sounds are repeated in alliterative phrases such as "durchs

Badische, Badische, Badische und Württemberg, Württemberg, Württemberg" (through

Baden, Baden, Baden and Württemberg, Württemberg, Württemberg, 7). The novel reflects

on how, at a grammatic level, the German language lends itself to repetition, partly due to the

relative poverty of basic vocabulary and the corresponding tendency to form compound

words and use common prefixes; in its so-called "Warmgestalt" (warm state, 64) German

uses "Kumulativformen" (cumulative forms): "die zusammengesetzten Wörter, sich laufend

neu bindend und wandelnd" (assembled words that perpetually combine anew and change,

65). But verbal repetition is something that not only *gives* by creating an

"aussersprachliche[n] Raum" (extra-linguistic dimension, 144) or "neue Plötzlichkeiten"

(new suddennesses, 150) and can make German more of a "Tanz- und Hochzeitsprache"

(language of dances and weddings, 151). It also *takes away*: The German language can

become unsettled and unsettling by repetition—"nicht mehr geheuer" (uncanny, 150). As

Weber states: "Wörter und Wortbedeutungen werden sinnfrei, wenn man sie wiederholt, sie

werden Klang, Geräusch, behängen sich mit Ausrufezeichen oder Fragezeichen" (Words and

their meanings become free of sense when you repeat them; they become sound, noise; they

append themselves with exclamation and question marks, 104).

Verbal repetition is not only harder to maintain over a longer distance than, say, a short

spoken word piece. It also has a dissolving and unsettling de-semanticising tendency to

which Weber's book makes clear reference, and does not unequivocally embrace. As the

book progresses, the repetition recedes a little, but never entirely, just as the individual

episodes narrated gain a little more contour. This also tracks with the perspective of a book published in 2007 which looks back on the recent "geological" upheavals in music and its corollaries. The 1990s are portrayed as a decade of purer, more naive repetition: "Jahre der Verheißung, blinden Erwartungen und vereinfachten Weltbilder" (years of promise, blind expectations and simplified images of the world), in which "die unverfrorensten Vereinfacher" (the boldest simplifiers, 151) set the tone. By the 2000s, the terrain had changed and become more nuanced. The "Auswürfe" (discharge) of the 1990s was "Luftblasen. Glase. Tuff" (air bubbles. Glass. [Volcanic] tuff, 148). But then there was a "fruchtbare Ascherregen, auf dem wieder Melodien sprießen. […] In den geplatzten Blasen: Gesang" (fertile rain of ash, from which melodies sprang forth again. […] In the burst bubbles: Song, 148). This all suggests that pure repetition, with which the book also experiments, receded and that there was again room for melodies (aka narrative) in the burst bubbles. Equally, Oliver is able to reflect from his belated standpoint on things that are possible when repetition does not dominate—for example "Erinnerung" (memory) and "Verinnerlichung" (internalization, 64), as well as narrative and irony. *DmJ* hence looks back on the "melodielosen Jahre" knowing that they have passed, and just as it experiments with repetition it is also open to other tones and possibilities, including bubbles (or episodes) of narrative melody, as well as irony, such as when exploring the possibility of returning to Switzerland and all it represents, as if one were a British tourist.

Conclusion

Two salient points that musicologists have made about repetitive music like EDM are that it can lead to a "loss of figure," and an attention to "moment time." This can be a liberating experience for the body and consciousness. Various German-language writers have reflected on these points at different sorts of levels, effectively privileging certain verbal discourse

about repetitive EDM by ennobling it in a literary setting. Those who did so at Suhrkamp added the prestige of a renowned, intellectual press. In the German setting, writers such as Goetz and Neumeister, writing at a comparatively early time, fully embraced EDM as a music of the zeitgeist, and steered around the anxieties that existed in some German quarters about EDM; that this musical form, which seemed to some to have a special connection to German culture, past and present, might be in effect proto-fascist or worrying for other reasons, given 20th century German history. A Swiss writer such as Peter Weber registered the liberating aspects of EDM for a young protagonist from East Switzerland, but did not need to counter the *kulturpessimistische* arguments arraigned against EDM to the north of the Swiss/German border. That may have been for reasons of timing. He was writing after the initial arguments against EDM had subsided a little. But it may very well also be because of his Swiss vantage.

Like his colleagues at Suhrkamp, Weber was carried by a conviction that this EDM brought implications not only for life in the digital epoch, but also for creative writing in German. If the "loss of figure" is a characteristic of repetition, then the contours, let alone psychological development of the protagonist never clearly emerge in *DmJ*. That is something that he shares with his Suhrkamp colleagues. He also applied some key intermedial approaches, all of which related in some way to repetition. There was alliteration, sentence level repetition, as well as more macro level repetition. Many of these devices seem to be particularly possible in the German language, as Weber reflected.   There were short passages where the repeated combination of paradoxical statements not only suggested EDM's moment time; they also approximated the vertical aspects of music. There was a mixing and carryover of individual words and sounds a la a deejay cross-fade. Whereas some of his German colleagues seemed happier to just do this in their writing, Weber added an extra level of

reflection about the process; about what he, in a perceptive insight, called *lingua rubata*. He was prepared to state that while repetition in literary writing can, by drawing out non-semantic dimensions of language, add to the feel and expressiveness of that written language, it does so in ways that are ultimately destructive of semantics. Repetition is both liberating and unfreedom. *Robbed* language was, as Weber pointedly observed, something that should be of interest to Swiss German writers; perhaps they were even hyper aware of the language implications, given their customary operating in a multilingual and dialect setting; writing in a language that is both one's own as well as that of a culturally dominant northerly neighbour. EDM-inspired *lingua rubata* was something that a Swiss writer like Weber could, by 2007, also consciously pick and choose from.

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